

# SKINNER'S BABY



HENRY IRVING DODGE



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By Henry Irving Dodge

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BY

HENRY IRVING DODGE



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TO  
MY WIFE



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# SKINNER'S BABY

## CHAPTER I

### SKINNER BEGINS TO ASK QUESTIONS

SKINNER was a sensitive man, properly sensitive, about some things. And Honey was properly sensitive, also. Therefore, they resolved between them not to let anybody know about something that was going to happen within a certain prescribed period in their particular family. But who ever heard of a man keeping such a secret? Within less than a fortnight from the time Skinner himself had been apprised of the coming event by Honey, and sworn to the strictest secrecy, practically every man in his business community knew what was going to take place.

Skinner's blundering came about in this way. He passionately wanted a boy.. That's what did it.

The signs first became apparent to Stevens. Stevens was the father of six, tapering from

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twelve down. He was a notorious bore when number one came, a photograph-producing nuisance. But now he had ceased to boast of the individual, and had taken to boasting of numbers instead.

Skinner had avoided Stevens, as all childless men are given to avoiding such boasters. But suddenly he began to court him. He could n't have courted a more experienced man. That's why Skinner did it. Quite casually one day he asked Stevens about little Jimmie's measles. Jimmie was the youngest of the Stevens tribe.

Stevens pricked up his ears. Why the deuce should Skinner be interested in little Jimmie, he thought.

"You have six boys," said Skinner. "You 've had experience. Tell me, what does the average boy want as soon as he's old enough to know *what* he wants?"

Ah! It was n't little Jimmie, it was the average little boy. Now, why was Skinner interested in the average little boy, thought Stevens.

"Tell me, Stevens," said Skinner one day,

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apropos of nothing at all, "is a rattle for a girl or for a boy?"

"A rattle?" Stevens looked up from his paper with a noncomprehending frown. He pondered the question a moment, then his face brightened. "Oh! A rattle's neutral."

Stevens buried his face in his newspaper again. But he was to find no asylum there.

Skinner was silent for a bit, then came back with, "I say, do girls play with drums?"

"Huh?" said Stevens, breaking away from an absorbing Wall Street item; "do girls play with *what*?"

"Drums."

"*Do girls play with drums?* I don't — Oh, you mean *baby girls*?"

"Of course — baby girls."

"No."

Stevens's nose was immediately buried in the Wall Street item again.

"Say, Stevens," shouted Skinner, calling his fellow-commuter back, after the latter had bidden him good-morning at the ferry and started toward Chambers Street. "Say!"

Stevens had in mind an important business

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deal and was hurrying to keep an appointment. Nevertheless, he dodged back under the heads of a pair of truck horses and got to Skinner's side.

"Tell me," said Skinner, "do girls play with little tin watches?"

"The devil, yes!"

Stevens started to dash away again, but Skinner caught him by the coat-sleeve and detained him.

"But don't boys, too?" Skinner almost pleaded.

Stevens saw the humor of it now.

"Look here, Skinner," he said, putting his lips close to Skinner's ear and shouting above the roar of the traffic, "if there's one thing the Lord put it into the mind of man to invent for a boy, it's a little tin watch, a little tin watch with plenty of insides to it."

Stevens paused a moment; then, "Now, may I go?"

"Thanks," said Skinner abstractedly, moving off in the opposite direction.

Stevens was convinced in his own mind of the real cause of Skinner's eccentric behavior,

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but to make sure, he mentioned the matter to Robinson. Robinson had had the same experience with Skinner. So had Billings. So had Mason. In fact, Skinner had been talking baby and toys to every man whose ear he could hold long enough, until all commutedom was scandalized by it.

Honey had carefully guarded their secret. There had been no leak from that quarter. So, much to her discomfort, she began to notice unwonted solicitude on the part of the neighbors. She was perplexed. By what subterranean channel of intuition had these women divined her secret? For she was sure they *had* divined it.

As a matter of fact, there had been no subtle divination about it. Her adroit husband could not have proclaimed their secret more effectively if he'd used a megaphone.

When Honey told Skinner that she was afraid her women friends knew all about it, he very gently chided his little wife with having been too talkative. Then, with true masculine sagacity, he added, "You did n't deny it, did you, Honey?"

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Skinner hoped that Honey might want a boy, too. And all along he felt that she did, just for his sake. But one evening he got a mild shock. He came upon Honey in her room sewing on some little garments.

“I see,” said he. “Preparedness.”

Skinner noticed that all the ribbons Honey was threading through the garments were pink.

“Why all pink?” he asked casually.

“Why?” Honey looked up, surprised.  
“Why, pink’s the color for girls, Dearie.”

Skinner tried to put some warmth into the smile he affected. He picked up a big rag doll that lay on the sofa beside Honey.

“Do — er — boys ever play with dolls?” Then, catching Honey’s reproachful look, he added resignedly, “Oh, I forgot, it’s going to be a pink ribbon one. That’s the idea.”

Honey shook her head decidedly, meaning “yes.”

Clearly, Honey had decided on a girl. That settled it.

But Skinner still hoped.

However, Skinner determined not to let the

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youngster, should it happen to be a boy, catch him napping. He carefully went over Honey's "preparedness" outfit, in order not to do any duplicating, then started in on a preparedness scheme of his own. Being a good business man, he decided not to load up with a lot of things that only a boy could use. He would take a neutral course, with a strong leaning toward the masculine, however. With every tin watch or rattle — neutral things — he'd buy a fire engine or a little tin horse on wheels or a gun — something emphatically masculine.

Skinner had never had a boyhood. Almost as soon as he could read, he was put to work. He had had to contribute his mite to the support of the family. When other children were playing, he was working. He was a little drudge, but a little drudge with big ideas. He had never had a fire engine or a little tin horse on wheels or a gun. Many, many times since he had thought of these things, because they had once been the special objects of his desire. While the little chap envied the boys who had playthings, he had never been soured. Nevertheless, he had always resented

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the fact that he had never had a boyhood, never had toys, never done the things that other boys had done. It seemed, as he looked back now, that he'd always been a man — a little man, then a big man, but always a man — never a boy.

Skinner didn't blame his parents that he'd never been like the children of the well-to-do, for his father had died when he was only three years old. And his mother — well, if there was anything that softened the resentment he felt, it was the thought of her, struggling to keep together and decently to rear her little brood. And Skinner was too much of a philosopher to blame destiny, for in the first place, he did n't exactly understand what destiny meant, and in the second place, he did n't think it would make any difference to destiny whether he blamed it or not. Nor did Skinner find consolation in the reflection that while other boys were playing, he was preparing for the great battle of life. He'd rather have had more fun and less preparedness.

So Skinner determined that his boy should not be denied a childhood, that his life should

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never be colored by resentment. He further resolved that when the boy should come, he, Skinner, would turn back the wheels of the order of things and realize his own long-deferred childhood. He had it all arranged. He and the boy were not to be father and son, but chums, playmates, boys together. He wondered if, after all, the ways of Providence, which he had so often questioned, were not better than his, Skinner's, ways, and whether it was n't better that he should have his childhood now with his own baby. Surely, it would be better for the baby.

And what a glorious childhood they were going to have together!

This was one of the plans that Skinner never divulged — not even to Honey. It was one of those intimate, sacred things we keep to ourselves.

So Skinner carefully guarded his preparedness scheme from Honey. This scheme he put into execution during business hours. Every day he would bring in queer-shaped bundles, which the office boy noticed he never took out again, and would store them in a large

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closet off his private office, which he had converted into a hiding-place for his treasures. There were no duplicate keys to this place. Skinner saw to that. There would be no janitorial espionage.

After office hours, when the others had gone home, Skinner would go to the sacred repository and bring out the toys and look them over,—the fire engine, the little tin horse on wheels, the gun, the drum, the soldier cap, the fife, the express wagon, the rattle, the tin watch, the miniature garden tools, and all the rest of them. He would fancy himself playing with his little boy of three. Naturally, his little boy was beautiful, idealized to the *n*th power, blue-eyed, yellow-haired, a romping, affectionate little devil, the kind all of us would like to have if we have any at all.

Skinner would walk up and down, blowing the little tin fife, without getting anything more out of it than a hissing sound, for it takes an expert to make one of those things blow the right kind of a tune. This he did to the infinite amusement of the little fellow with the yellow curls, who stood by, clapping his

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hands and jumping up and down with delight.

When he had exhausted his wind and his patience with the fife, Skinner would slip the drum strap about his neck, put on the little soldier cap, tilting it at a rakish angle, and pick up the drumsticks. He'd stand rigid for a moment, then turn and cry out to his little playfellow, "Forward! March!" beat the drum softly, lest the scrubwoman outside might hear, and away they'd go with a kind of goose-step strut the full length of the room. Then Skinner would halt with his toes touching the baseboard and his nose close up to the wall and give the word of command. "About face!" Then he'd grin down at the little fellow, who would grin up at him, and back they'd march to the desk again.

After this, their daily maneuver, Skinner would take off his military accouterments, pick up his hat and stick, tuck Baby snugly back into his heart, where he always carried him except when he brought him out to play in the daylight in the late afternoons in the office, and go home.

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Thus Skinner got acquainted with his baby a long time before the latter arrived. It never occurred to him that in building up these little scenes of happiness to come, he was taking a long chance in case the little one should not be a boy.

One day Skinner brought home a pup, a blunt-snouted little dog, shrewd-faced and whiskered, and with a long, heavy-built body and short legs. This little dog was designed in the course of time to develop into the regular type of Scotch terrier.

Even in his extreme youth the dog had so much heavy dignity that Skinner and Honey at once dubbed him "Sobersides," a name that he carried with him to an honored grave many years later.

"I got him young, so I can train him," said Skinner. "By the time *she* gets here," he added, making his customary concession to Honey's feelings in the matter, "he'll be old enough to protect her."

And Honey smiled indulgently.

Once the wobble was out of Sobersides's legs and he could walk without staggering all

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over the place, Skinner put him in the primer class. The *a b c* of a dog's education is to shake hands. Long did Sobersides regard Skinner with puzzled wonderment as the latter tapped his little right foot with his forefinger many times and repeated, "Shake!" But presently it dawned upon him that his master wanted him to lift his own little paw in response. He did so, and was rewarded by a gentle caress, which greatly pleased him. After that, he associated the stretching out of Skinner's hand and the sound of the word "shake" with the lifting of his own little paw and the following caress.

Next, Sobersides was taught to jump the hoop, the hoop being made out of Skinner's arms. That was as far as Sobersides's fancy education went. For Skinner had no idea of raising a trick dog in his home.

Sobersides was to be guide, philosopher, and friend to Baby Skinner. It was to be a strenuous life, the one they had picked out for Sobersides, one that would sorely try his patience. So he must be made above all things temper-proof. Rough usage was to be the

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method. Skinner used from day to day to pummel Sobersides good-naturedly, pull his wiry hair, roll him over and over, turn him on his back and spin him around like a top.

Strenuous it was, but presently Sobersides got to love this course of preparedness, threw under it, and grew strong.

But the keen, the young-fatherish delight of it all was marred by a fear that constantly stalked through Skinner's thoughts. Honey! For Honey meant everything to Skinner. Sometimes this fear was well defined and horrid, again, it was vague and afar off, but always there. The only thing that kept the dread of it all from overwhelming Skinner was Honey. He got courage from her courage. She never seemed afraid.

The day finally arrived, as such days have a way of doing. Skinner and Sobersides waited together in the next room. Skinner walked up and down nervously. Sobersides lay with his nose on his paws, his unwinking eyes fixed on the door of The Room.

Presently Sobersides pricked up one ear, and Skinner, on the alert for any kind of a

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sign, noted the act, halted, and watched the dog keenly. For a moment Sobersides seemed to be studying the door of The Room. Then he began, in a hesitating, puzzled way, to beat the floor gently with his tail.

Skinner's heart seemed to be climbing into his throat and he impulsively put his hand to his breast to press down its turbulence.

Feeling that his senses had deceived him, Sobersides rested his nose on his paws again.

"False alarm, old chap," said Skinner.

After a few minutes, Sobersides lifted his head with a quick, decided movement, his eyes, nose, and ears pointing straight at the door of The Room, gave a low growl, and beat the floor with his tail, gladly, decidedly.

For a moment Skinner stood still, absolutely still, his head bent to one side, his ears pricked up, too, like an eavesdropper's. Then a thin, squeaky little bawl, a cry that seemed to come from afar off, like some one calling from the other side of a great gulf in the dark, a weird, uncanny, curiously thrilling little cry, a cry that would have been *only* a cry to anybody else, told Skinner that the little playmate that

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he and Sobersides had been training for, waiting for, laying up a store of gladness and patience and good resolutions for, had arrived at last from somewhere away off beyond the stars to keep its tryst with them; that the little fellow with whom he had played in the office night after night, the little "forward, march!" fellow, the little fellow with the blue eyes and the yellow curls and the clapping hands and the dancing feet and the glad laugh of his fancy, was here in the flesh, actually here in the flesh, his baby!

Skinner vaguely realized the discrepancy between the thin, ever so thin, squeaky little bawl he now heard, and the glad, musical laugh of the child of his fancy. But his emotions were too turbulent at the moment to take definite note of the fact.

It was only a little, thin, piping thing, that cry, but there never was a cry like it, no music so singularly sweet. At the sound of it, Skinner himself came completely to life. He'd never been wholly alive before. He realized it now. This little dot of flesh with a soul in it that had just come from somewhere out in the

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universe, with its coming had made a regular fellow of Skinner, a regular man, a father! At last Skinner realized that he was a link in the chain, not the dangling end of it. He was no longer a part of the fringe of things, the ragged edge, a thread. He was woven into the social fabric. He had discharged a divinely bestowed responsibility.

## CHAPTER II

### SKINNER GETS A SURPRISE

WHEN the doctor told him that it was a boy, Skinner just could n't conceal his delight. But in the midst of his rejoicing, he suddenly thought of Honey's preparations for her pink ribbon baby, of how disappointed she must be. He impulsively started toward The Room, but the doctor laid a hand on his arm.

"Wait a minute. The nurse is bringing"—then, with a real human twinkle—"Baby Skinner in to meet his dad."

Skinner thought this attempt at wit required some recognition. He laughed in a dry, cackling, nervous way, and gripped at the doctor's hand, but missed it as that gentleman had already gone to the door of The Room, beckoned the nurse, and made his exit.

Skinner stood there, anticipating.

No débutante, on being presented at Court, could have felt less at ease, for Skinner was

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about to be presented to something higher than royalty — his own offspring.

Presently, a calm-faced woman appeared with a bundle in her arms, a fluffy, downy bundle, like a little chick grown to enormous proportions. Skinner drew himself up proudly and looked in the direction of the nurse and the bundle.

“My son!” he murmured, almost inarticulately. He felt that it was necessary to say something.

The nurse advanced majestically a few paces. She, too, felt her position. Her importance was vicarious, she knew; nevertheless, they must come to her, for she was the custodian of the royal infant.

Skinner crossed the room on his toes, gingerly, and paused. Without ado the practical woman, not realizing that this was Skinner's first baby, that he was an “unaccustomed father,” with her forefinger abruptly pushed the covering back from the face of the little Skinner.

Skinner had anticipated something more deliberate on the part of the nurse. The face of

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his infant was flashed upon him without proper dramatic preparation.

Skinner was a gentleman. But there are some things against which blood and training are not always proof — shock or disappointment. In Court circles of Europe, courtiers and diplomats are schooled to control their features, never to betray surprise. No matter how bizarre the appearance of some Oriental visitor, for instance, or how frightful his manners, the aforesaid gentlemen never show amazement or disgust. The poker-player schools his features not to act as a looking-glass wherein his opponents may read the value of his hand. But Skinner was neither a diplomat nor a poker-player. And the face he beheld was an unlovely one, decidedly unlovely.

Skinner blinked, shut his eyes tight for a moment, then opened them again. The little dot of a face, swollen, red, and puckered, was hideously unbeautiful. There was something wrong, Skinner thought; there must be something wrong.

Skinner could by no jugglery of fancy pic-

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ture this, his first-born, into the forerunner of the beautiful child that had played with him in the office, the little angel with the yellow hair and blue eyes. He inwardly thanked God that he had n't first looked upon the face of his offspring in the presence of the anxious and scrutinizing eyes of Honey.

The nurse was an expert in babies. She had seen the most unpromising tidbits of humanity develop into beautiful girls and boys. Skinner's hesitation piqued her.

“What's the matter with him, Mr. Skinner? He's a fine boy?” she asked with rising inflection.

“No-nothing,” said Skinner, not exactly knowing what he was expected to say. “No-nothing that I can see, but —”

“But what? He looks just like you.”

Skinner gave a quick glance at the puckered face in the bundle. He grinned nervously.

“Oh, *does* he?” Then feeling at a loss what else to say, he stammered, “In — in just what — *respect* — does he look — like me?”

The expert in babies was not accustomed

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to having her opinion questioned by a mere father, an "unaccustomed father," at that.

"Look at that head. Just like yours."

In an effort to redeem himself in the eyes of the nurse, Skinner put out a timorous forefinger and passed it gingerly over the baby's cranium. The touch of the fuzzy little thing thrilled him.

"By Jove, it is soft, eh?"

"If that's all you have to say, that his *head is soft*, I guess I'll take him back to his mother!"

The nurse started to march off with her charge.

Skinner watched her, watched her till she reached the door. He did n't speak. But he thought thoughts, thoughts of which he was the protagonist, but not the hero.

"I'm a jackass, a darned ungracious jackass!" he said to himself. "I'm a boor, an unsociable, unappreciative, ungrateful boor to treat the little chap that way, after he's made his long journey through space to meet me, not to give him a word of welcome! What kind of an unfeeling brute am I, anyway?"

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The suggestion of a sob came up in Skinner's throat. He stepped over and caught the nurse by the sleeve. "Here." Then, as she turned, "Give him to me. Le' me have him." Then, apologetically, "You see, I was kind of shocked, upset. I'm not used to it. Devilish ungracious of me, was n't it? — when I think of what *she*'s gone through in there!"

The nurse smiled warmly. "That's all right, Mr. Skinner. You did n't know any better." She made a place for the baby in the crook of Skinner's elbow and showed him how to hold it.

As Skinner felt the little, warm, helpless thing against his side and bent over and rubbed his chin, ever so gently, against the top of the silky, fuzzy little head, he realized all at once what it meant to be a father, the significance of it, the importance of it, the privilege and the responsibility.

"And you really think he looks like me?" he asked, as he handed the baby to the nurse.

"He has eyes and a nose and a mouth and a chin, and you have the same," said the woman, with an attempt at sarcasm.

Skinner stood looking at the bundle in the

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nurse's arms until she closed the door behind her. Then he thrust his hands into his trousers pockets, smiled in a patronizing way at Sobersides, who was pointing the door of The Room again, and said, "And I used to think all babies looked alike, Sobersides! But they don't! Well, hardly!"

Sobersides wagged his tail, showing perfect accord with Skinner's sentiments.

"I knew you'd agree with me," said Skinner, patting the grizzly head the dog poked into his hand.

When, a few minutes later, Skinner bent close to Honey and whispered, "I'm so sorry, sorry for you, dear, that it is n't a pink ribbon one," Honey stared at him in resentful surprise.

"Why, Dearie, did n't you know he's just what I wanted all along!"

And, presently, when Skinner went back into the other room, he looked at Sobersides, who was anxiously waiting for the latest news, and shook his head and observed, "Even now I don't understand women, Sobersides. Do you?"

And Sobersides, not fully comprehending,

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yet just to be polite, wagged his tail non-committally.

"What do you mean by that?" said Skinner.

Sobersides, having it put plump to him, cocked his ears which meant, "Repeat the question slowly."

Skinner did so and Sobersides wagged a distinct "no" with his tail.

"Sobersides," mused Skinner, shaking the muzzle which the dog had thrust into his hand, "you speak with your eyebrows and your ears and your tail, and I can only speak with my tongue," which Sobersides confirmed with his tail. "I'm beginning to get onto your language, old chap. You ask questions with your ears and answer with your tail, don't you? Being thus equipped, you can talk twice as fast as I can, can't you?"

And Sobersides wagged "yes"!

Skinner and Sobersides were on an equal footing when it came to acquiring the new language that the little stranger had brought with him from somewhere the other side of the stars. If anything, Sobersides learned the

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language more quickly than Skinner, because it was more primitive.

Sobersides's presentation to the new arrival took place the next day when the nurse brought Baby Skinner into the sitting-room. He observed the little bundle in the woman's lap carefully, then, as became the official protector and custodian of the family, he proceeded to register the newcomer in his list of smells. He advanced very gingerly, with a reassuring wagging of his tail to indicate that he was approaching in a spirit of friendliness, and sniffed at it. With his cold nose he touched the red dot of a hand inquisitively, then started back, shocked, as the air was rent by a frightful sound, the like of which Sobersides had never heard before.

Honey's voice was musical and sweet, and Skinner's had in it a caress that the dog loved. But there was no music in this sound. And what amazed Sobersides was, that while a big fellow like Skinner spoke in a gentle, low voice, a dot that was n't any more than half as big as he, Sobersides, should express itself in this ear-splitting, house-filling bawl.

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What did it mean? Furthermore, Sobersides had never had his caresses received that way before. He could n't understand it. He retreated to his customary asylum under the corner of the sofa and pondered.

Nor would he come forth until Skinner got down on his hands and knees, poked his head under the corner of the sofa, and explained to Sobersides that that was the way of all infants and that there was nothing personal.

And then they shook hands in a perfectly fraternal spirit.

For some time Sobersides did not understand the baby, could not grasp what it was all about, this new thing that had come into the restricted family circle and threatened to mar the tranquillity of the household. It was in the nurse's arms most of the time, and Sobersides did n't care anything about that, for the woman was a comparative stranger to him. When Honey took it, he was conscious of a new, unpleasant feeling. But when Skinner's attention was deflected from himself to the baby, Sobersides suffered an unmistakable

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pang of jealousy, for he loved Skinner above everything else in the world.

One day, while Honey and Skinner were playing with the baby, Honey indicated by a motion of the hand, and Skinner, looking, saw Sobersides in the corner of the room watching them sadly, reproachfully. He immediately crossed the room, took the dog in his arms, and brought him back to the little family group.

After that, Sobersides, realizing that the baby was not going to push him aside, edge him out of it, that Skinner's love and Honey's love were broad enough to cover both him and the baby, decided to accept it as one of the family.

But his reconciliation was not complete until Honey, one day when Sobersides was stretched on the floor, resting, after a strenuous morning of resting on the back porch, brought the baby and put it between his front and hind legs, and rested its little back against his shaggy breast. Then Sobersides felt that the limit of honorable responsibility had been thrust upon him. It was the official putting of the baby into his keeping.

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Honey's act changed the relative positions of Sobersides and Skinner with regard to the baby. Before that, Skinner had been responsible, the protector; now it was Sobersides who was the protector. Before that, Sobersides had been jealous of Skinner; now he was jealous of the baby.

Because of the new protectorate that had been imposed upon him, Sobersides was now a more important member of the family than ever. He was a most convenient, handy member of the family. If ever there was a dog Pooh-Bah Sobersides was he. If Honey wanted some one to talk to, Sobersides was there, always an attentive, sympathetic listener, wagging his tail in cordial acquiescence, no matter what was said or done. Furthermore, he never talked back nor interrupted nor repeated what he heard. Honey could depend on him for that. If Skinner wanted a companion for a walk, there was Sobersides, always with his hat on and ready. If Baby wanted to pull hair, Sobersides submitted his grizzly back or breast.

Sobersides, be it understood, was not a de-

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signing dog. He would n't for worlds have sought to alienate the affections of the baby from its natural parents. But soon Baby Skinner began to evince more pleasure in Sobersides's company than he did in that of Honey and Skinner — and Sobersides was n't going to stand in the way. And the most singular part of it all was that this great love which Baby Skinner conceived for Sobersides was to change the destiny of one of the most remarkable men of the business world — a man whom neither one had ever seen or dreamed of.

Skinner's education, so far as a baby was concerned, developed rapidly. He had always felt somehow that boys belonged to men. Furthermore, he had specifically ordained that his baby should be a boy. And now that it *was* a boy, as he had ordained, it must be his, Skinner's.

But, like most men in such matters, Skinner reckoned without his host.

Skinner noted with some apprehension that there was a change in Honey, the submissive, adoring Honey, whom he had always domi-

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nated. It gradually dawned upon him that Honey had taken on a certain assertiveness, a mild, gentle, but absolutely unyielding assertiveness. True, she always graciously assented to Skinner's suggestions, but in the matter of the baby — well, Honey was like a feather bed, ever so yielding till you reach the slats, then firm. And the slats were anything that pertained to the baby.

By Jove, what was it? Skinner thought. Did Honey, after all, have something to do with this boy as well as he?

Skinner put the question to Sobersides and Sobersides wagged his tail in a decided manner which Skinner — who had just come from a rather argumentative session with Honey — interpreted as, "Well, rather!"

Skinner was perturbed. Was there to be a divided authority? That would never do. It would be bad for discipline, the "unaccustomed father" reasoned. But presently he realized that there was n't to be any divided authority, that there was to be only one authority, and that authority was to reside in Honey.

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Long before the baby came, Skinner decided upon a name for it, which name, for obvious reasons, he had held in abeyance. As soon as he learned that the newcomer was a boy, he had felt that his motion for a name would be carried without opposition. But Honey's new assertiveness had given him pause. He felt sure, from her tendency toward the super-refined, the romantic, that she had picked out some æsthetic name for their son. If such were the case, her plan must be circumvented.

The very first name Honey suggested showed Skinner that his suspicions and fears were not unfounded. But he was prepared.

“Cecil,” Honey ventured, sweetly, tentatively.

Skinner bent his head and stroked his eyelids with thumb and forefinger. “I’d like it more typically American. Say Christopher.”

“Goodness!” cried Honey. “He’s too little for a name like that.”

“But, my dear, he’ll grow up to it, won’t he? — eh?”

Honey shook her head.

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“Methuselah grew up to his name, did n’t he?” Skinner urged.

“Yes, but it took him a thousand years.”

“It did n’t take Nebuchadnezzar that long.”

“Don’t be silly, Dearie. How would Reginald do?”

Reginald! His son could never carry a name like that into a boiler shop, Skinner thought, and his son might have to work for a living some day.

“They’d call him ‘Reggie,’ ” Skinner said.  
“How about Peter, Honey?”

Honey recoiled slightly.

“They’d call him ‘Pete’ or ‘Petey’ — the boys would. It has a kind of vinegar sound to me.”

“Well,” said Skinner, “what do you suggest?”

“Don’t you think Algernon is a pretty name?”

Algernon! The name suggested to Skinner a long-curled, knee-breeched, big-collared and bowed, slender princeling of a boy that one sees in story-books, a boy with great, blue eyes and delicate fingers and small calves, the kind

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of a boy that would pinch a cat's tail and then lie out of it.

"Pretty? Yes, Honey. But Skinner is n't. They don't hook up well." Skinner laughed. "You must remember that you've got 'Skinner' to deal with, always Skinner. Prefixing one of those fancy names would be like putting a gold handle on a frying-pan. Algernon Chesterfield, yes. But Algernon *Skinner*! We must n't make the boy ridiculous, remember. Why not Henry?"

"They'd call him 'Hank,'" Honey objected.

Skinner winced.

"The most unpicturesque nickname I ever heard of, designed especially to be uttered by persons who speak through their noses."

Skinner paused. Honey was sufficiently prepared now, he thought, to consider the name he had set his heart on.

"Why, it's obvious," he burst out. "Let's call him William Manning Rutherford Skinner! Rutherford, see? — thus we record the aristocratic strain in him."

Honey lifted her hands in protest.

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"Not all at once," Skinner went on. "Give it to him in sections as he grows up."

"But you put Rutherford after Manning, *your* mother's name," Honey pouted. "No, sir! Put Rutherford second, and we'll call it a compromise."

So Skinner's baby started off with the name William Rutherford Manning Skinner trailing behind him like the tail of a kite.

## CHAPTER III

### IN WHICH SKINNER'S BABY IS INVOLVED IN A VERY SINGULAR WAY

LET us turn back a year and pick up another of the threads of this story, a thread which, if followed long enough, will lead to circumstances involving Skinner's baby in a very singular way.

Out in St. Paul lived Willard Jackson, multimillionaire, rough diamond, thorough-going Middle West dominant character, a man whom everybody knows who knows his America.

Jackson had worked his way up by force of brain, hard sense, energy, and muscle. He was a self-educated man, which means that he was well posted in all the essentials of life. While he despised weakness in men, he was always willing to help the weak. Physically, Jackson was a fine specimen. His arms were long, his hands big and strong, his face red, his mustache stubbly and tawny, and his eyes a

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peculiar Minnesota blue. His only bad habits were an infrequent glass of whiskey and a frequent big, black cigar.

Jackson was a perfect engine of energy. His fires were never stoked. He always had steam up. He could fight his opponents at a directors' meeting or at the annual convention of stock-holders of any one of his various companies for twenty-four hours at a stretch, smoke a black cigar, fight them for twenty-four hours more, smoke another black cigar and go to his office primed for the regular business of the day. That's the kind of a fighter Jackson was.

Jackson asked no mercy if the fight should go against him, which it rarely did, and was always magnanimous when he won the fight. So generous was he, in fact, that his opponents used humorously to say, "We'll fare a good deal better if Jackson beats us than we will if we beat *him*."

As a young man, when a foreman, Jackson had fought his way with his fists as well as with his brain. And he had never forgotten the manly art. If he had any weakness, this was it.

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Madison Square Garden knew him well. Following boxing events and baseball was his only relaxation.

Almost all of the good fairies had stood at Jackson's cradle, although he was born in very humble quarters. They had conferred upon him nearly all the blessings that man has any right to expect. He had never known a day's sickness. Money had poured into his hands almost from the start. He had dominated youngsters when he was a little fellow, and when he grew up, he dominated men. His wealth was practically boundless.

But Jackson's dearest wish, a wish that antedated his ambition for power and for money, was for a son.

Incidentally, let it be understood that Willard Jackson was the biggest customer of McLaughlin, Perkins & Skinner.

As Jackson grew older and richer, he found himself more and more isolated. Many of his old friends, his best friends, ceased to come to see him as they used to do, fearing that he might think that they had an axe to grind, a favor to ask.

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So Jackson longed more and more for the companionship of a son.

Besides, Jackson had regarded the coming of a son as the fulfillment of his marriage scheme. Now that he was a great captain of industry, he wanted some one to take control when he should lay down the reins. He longed for the time to come when he should sit back and contemplate the great industries that he had organized, builded, with the comfortable sense of his own flesh and blood, some one that he could trust, continuing to dominate them. He wanted *his* son to work for the interests of the sons of the men who had helped him, Jackson, build up his great works, just as he had worked for the interests of their fathers before them.

Jackson was now forty-five, the threshold of middle age. He realized that he would be an old man before his son, if he should have one, could grow up. Still, his dream of companionship, his dream of a successor in business, did not fade, for he figured that he could run things thirty years longer. But there were times when the vista of a thirty years' stretch

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of uninterrupted toil wearied him, that is to say, wearied him at the end of a strenuous day. But next morning it had no terrors for him.

So, in his own way, Jackson prayed for a son. He had not been in the habit of praying for anything he could get by fighting for, and even now he did n't pray in so many words as you or I or the Pharisees pray. He was more businesslike, more sincere, even in his dealings with the Lord.

In a way, Jackson was superstitious — in a practical way. Every time he'd say, "Lord, send me a boy," he'd give some tramp a dollar or send some poor family a ton of coal or a barrel of flour. That's how he came to be known as something of a philanthropist, for, just to show the Lord that he was n't any unappreciative quitter, he kept right on giving out dollar bills and tons of coal and barrels of flour, even after his prayer had been answered.

In his heart Jackson did not relish the preparations that were being made to receive the baby. No royal chamber was ever more

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splendid, more soft and silken, more æsthetic. How different it all was from his idea of the way a young soldier of industry, the son of a great master workman, should be brought into the world. True, he was used to magnificence now, but this manifestation of kingly luxury still antagonized him, even as it had antagonized him when he was a boy and had hated and envied the rich.

Jackson was troubled. He wanted his boy to begin life as he had begun it, in a way to make his muscles tough, his brain keen and alert. He wanted him to be born a common man, so that he'd know men, be one of them, as he, Jackson, had been. For experience had taught him that the only way to rule men was to understand them. And the only way to understand men was to live right down among them, to hear them swear and pray, to see them eat and drink, to see how ignorant they were, how weak, how strong, how vain, how sincere, how bad, how good. That was the only way to strike an average. One could n't know men by observing them afar off from a king's castle on the mountain peak, by

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looking down at them, for then they all seem to be of the same stature.

But Mrs. Willard Jackson had her own particular plans for "Sonny," which plans Willard Jackson learned to his bitter disappointment later on.

Jackson sensed the trend of things at the very beginning, sensed it from the preparedness outfit, the numerous nurses, the whole *entourage* that had been engaged to meet the young princeling of finance. But he did n't ask any questions, he did n't make any suggestions, he simply accepted things. For Willard Jackson was accustomed to letting his wife manage their domestic affairs and everything that pertained thereto. He might, in his heart of hearts, have experienced a pang that in this particular instance he was not consulted, but if he did, no one knew it. Furthermore, Jackson felt that as his wife was the great protagonist in this drama, he was going to indulge her in every respect. Money was no object. She might have lined the walls with gold, for all he cared. What obscured all considerations of a personal na-

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ture, was his supreme joy that his prayer was about to be answered. What the deuce did he care how many blue bows or governesses adorned the place? Nevertheless, Jackson hated French governesses.

Yes, Willard Jackson was troubled about all these preparations. He was apprehensive, — the more apprehensive because whenever he ventured to broach the subject to his wife he was met with gentle but premeditated evasion. An indefinable fear entered his heart. Was it possible there was to be a difference of opinion as to the bringing up of the boy, confusion, a possible conflict?

Willard Jackson had always been in the habit of managing things for himself. He'd never left it to the hand of destiny to shape his affairs for him. But in the present instance he seemed peculiarly helpless. So he worried, worried, never dreaming that there was a little soul, hovering somewhere in space, to be born a year later, half a continent away, a little soul who would solve his problem for him in an instant and in the simplest possible way.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SOBERSIDES'S LOUD PEDAL INCIDENT

BABY SKINNER survived all baby experiences, good and bad, and arrived one day, in company with many other babies in the world, at the interesting age of four.

Also, Sobersides had "arrived." He was now a well-developed, sturdy dog, with long wiry hair, shaggy eyebrows, a proper allowance of whiskers, and a tail which was about the length and curve of a third of a barrel hoop and which, bannerlike, he carried on high whenever he was on his feet.

While Sobersides was eternally loyal to his first love, Skinner, there had come to exist between him and his little playmate an indissoluble bond. Naturally, as Baby Skinner and Sobersides had grown up together, sympathetic, reciprocal in their affections, mutual in their likes and dislikes, the youngster had come to know more of dog psychology than had Skinner himself.

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Sobersides had been toughened by participation in the strenuous activities of Baby Skinner. He was temper-proof, so far as his little playmate was concerned. When Baby Skinner's hand was in his mouth, there was never enough pressure of those powerful jaws to burst a soap bubble. Many a punch in the nose he got from those tiny fists. And lots of times Baby Skinner squeezed his paws till he fairly groaned. Often they would lock arms and roll over and over, and Sobersides would jump up and dash away, stand off for a few moments, and then with lowered head rush back to the attack, for he loved the game as much as Baby did.

Neither Baby Skinner nor Sobersides was ever known to betray the confidence of the other.

When Baby Skinner heard his father coming in in the evening, he would hide behind a chair. And then Sobersides, although his heart was tingling with excitement at the game, would assume an impenetrable ignorance as to Baby's whereabouts.

“Where is he, Sobersides?” Skinner would shout.

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But Sobersides would be as motionless as a hound pointing a quarry. But when Skinner, with a loud shout of surprise, would discover Baby back of the big chair where he always hid, Sobersides would join in the glee that followed.

In return, Baby Skinner never gave Sobersides's whereabouts away on bath day.

Every so often, Sobersides would disappear. They might change the day — and they did — but it made no difference. When the maid appeared with brushes and towels and dog soap, Sobersides was nowhere to be found. For Sobersides, be it understood, loathed warm water and soap, which he always associated with a fearful smarting of his eyes and a rubbing and tumbling about that was most uncomfortable and distasteful. Why did they do it if they loved him, he wondered. Of course, each bath was followed by a feeling of frisky liveliness, but Sobersides would have dispensed with that if they'd only let him alone.

And Baby Skinner knew just how Sobersides felt.

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One day, just after Baby Skinner had passed his fourth milepost along the road that stretches from eternity to eternity, the McLaughlins called on the Skinners. They brought with them their six-year-old boy, Jimmie, who, later on, for good and sufficient reasons, shall be known as "Bully" McLaughlin. Even at that age, little McLaughlin had begun to give evidences of the propensity which subsequently justified his nickname.

He was a stubbly-haired, red-faced boy, with sturdy legs, was Jimmie.

Skinner had hoped that when the McLaughlins made their customary calls they would leave their youngster at home. But he'd reckoned without his host. Mrs. McLaughlin had a passion for showing off her powerfully built offspring on every possible occasion. Skinner had never been drawn to McLaughlin's boy. He did n't know why, but he did n't like him. It was one of those unaccountable, natural antagonisms that the world is full of. Perhaps their remote ancestors had fought with and hated each other in the jungle. Perhaps there was a strain of the

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cat in the one and a strain of the dog in the other. At any rate, Skinner did n't like little McLaughlin, and he felt somehow that little McLaughlin sensed his dislike and distrusted him in return.

All went well however until at a point right in the midst of Mrs. McLaughlin's gushing felicitations to Honey on Baby Skinner's good looks and McLaughlin's smiling, yet dignified, acquiescence, the air was rent by a sharp yap from Sobersides. Everybody turned and looked at the dog who, conscious that he had made a sensation, was shamefaced.

“What the deuce made him do that?” Skinner wondered.

Sobersides was a well-behaved, retiring dog. He had never been known to obtrude his presence in any ungentlemanly way before.

“Goodness!” cried Mrs. McLaughlin, “how that dog startled me!”

“I never knew him to yelp like that,” said Honey. “What's the matter, Sobersides?”

But Sobersides, gentleman that he was, declined to tell. Furthermore, the sharp pain to which he had been subjected might have

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been due to an accident on the part of a certain small boy.

"Perhaps he had a nightmare," said McLaughlin.

Not so. Sobersides had been quietly resting, as was his custom, his unsuspecting tail stretched out behind him in perfect confidence on the floor. Sobersides's tail, that part of a dog which seems to have been created especially for the resourceful machinations of the small boy, had been a sacred thing in the Skinner household, a thing immune, inviolable. It belonged to Sobersides. It was a part of his dignity.

Little McLaughlin's eyes had roamed over the room, like the eyes of all small boys, but their gaze had not been arrested until they took in Sobersides's tail, that tempting tail. It was a chance not to be lost. Jimmie glanced cautiously about and then began edging around back of his mother's chair, until he got within leg distance of the unconscious Sobersides. Assuring himself that he was not observed, the small boy lifted his foot and brought the edge of his heel sharply down on Sobersides's

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tail. Automatically, Sobersides opened his mouth, just as if Jimmie had pulled a string, and gave a sharp yelp.

With lightning-like alacrity, the six-year-old recovered his position behind his mother's chair, and joined in the amazement of the others at the unaccountable behavior of Sobersides.

"As I was saying," Mrs. McLaughlin resumed, "your baby is much like you, looks like you both really, now like one, now like the other, a fleeting impression. Oh! That dog!"

There was another sharp yelp!

This time Skinner, who had had his suspicions, turned before little McLaughlin had a chance to withdraw his foot from Sobersides's loud pedal. In fact, everybody caught Jimmie with the goods.

Mrs. McLaughlin turned and put her arm around Jimmie's shoulders. "There, there, Jimmie love, be careful! He might bite you!" Then to Honey, "Really, Mrs. Skinner, I wish you'd send that dog out of the room. I'm so afraid the next time Jimmie steps on his tail, he'll bite the child.— Jimmie's

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a *regular* boy, you know," she laughed to Skinner.

And Skinner laughed back, an insincere, flattering laugh, for he had begun to hate the *regular* boy. He glanced at McLaughlin, who was also smiling, a sickly smile back of which Skinner read disgust.

Honey rose and indicated to the well-trained Sobersides that he was to leave the room. As his nether quarters were disappearing through the door, the *regular* boy aimed a kick at him. But the dog suspected and was alert.

"Naughty doggie! Naughty doggie!" said Mrs. McLaughlin, as Sobersides eluded the kick.

And Skinner vowed that if McLaughlin had n't been his partner, he would have liked to see Sobersides strip a piece of skin off Jimmie's calf the size of a dollar bill.

It is impossible to tell what Sobersides thought of man's sense of justice as he sat outside, humiliated, resentful, saddened, but most of all, puzzled, at the treatment he had received. He consoled himself with the

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promise, however, that at the first opportunity he would go to Skinner and make known his feelings in the matter, and receive consolation from the gentle touch and kind word of his loving master. Nevertheless, he made a record in his dog's notebook of the looks and the smell of little McLaughlin as one to be avoided.

Sobersides waited patiently until the hated boy had left with his parents, then suddenly squeezed in before the unobserving Honey had a chance to close the door. And, as he had hoped, he was compensated for his undeserved disgrace by being made much of by Skinner. In a short time the dog had resumed his customary business of resting, with his tail stretched out in perfect confidence behind him.

No sooner had the door closed on the McLaughlins, than Skinner turned to Honey. "If there's one thing in the world I detest —" He was interrupted by the nurse, who had come to take Baby Skinner to the nursery for his afternoon nap.

"Detest what?" asked Honey, when the

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kindly, inquisitive soul had closed the door behind her.

"I detest Jimmie McLaughlin," said Skinner impulsively. "I can't help detesting him, even if he *is* only six years old!"

"It is n't the child's fault," Honey urged. "It's the way they're bringing him up. She's an awful fool over him."

"But why does n't *Mac* do something about it? Why does n't *he* put his foot down?"

Apparently the idea struck Honey as delicious.

"Put his foot down? Why, he does n't even dare to open his mouth."

"By Jove, I would," Skinner protested stoutly.

"You're different, Dearie," said Honey sweetly.

Skinner thought he detected a touch of gentle irony in Honey's words. He pondered a bit. He wondered if he really were different from McLaughlin. "But does n't she see that it's all wrong?" he urged.

"Anything wrong with Jimmie?" Honey laughed. "You don't know the woman,

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Dearie. I tell you, she's a perfect fool over him. She always *has* been."

"Are n't all women fools over their children?"

"I'm not!"

"That remains to be seen," said Skinner.

"I don't think that's a bit nice of you, Dearie."

Skinner patted Honey's hand.

"I'm different from Mrs. McLaughlin," Honey resumed, mollified; "different in this way. She thinks she owns Jimmie, that Mac has nothing to do with him at all. She would n't admit it, but she feels that way. I can read her. I know."

"I don't understand how any *one* parent can feel that way—" Skinner paused, suddenly realizing that for months before Baby Skinner was born, he, the father, had thought of the child, his son, as almost exclusively his own, and that even after the little fellow had appeared he'd continued so to regard him until Honey had educated the idea out of him.

"The trouble was," Honey went on, "Mac

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tacitly admitted it at the start. That's where he made his mistake."

Skinner nodded. "I see," he said.

Honey's words made Skinner uncomfortable. For the first time he realized that even now he was beginning to approach any suggestion regarding his baby with caution, if not trepidation. Honey was n't like Mrs. McLaughlin, oh, dear, no! She was n't big and dominating. But she was ten times more formidable, if one only knew it: she was little and gentle and acquiescent. Then the thought of the devilish old feather-bed simile came back to Skinner: soft and yielding till you reached the slats. And the slats meant anything that pertained to the baby.

"I see," Skinner repeated absently.

"I feel sorry for Mac," said Honey. "I do, indeed."

Again Skinner pondered. Honey's words might have a bearing on his own case. There was a suggestion of a gloomy forecast to them, a foreboding, that he did n't like. "Just why do you feel sorry for Mac?" he asked very slowly.

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“It’s a house divided against itself. Cliques, that’s what it is, cliques. Mrs. McLaughlin and the boy, one clique, and Mac a clique all by himself.”

“I see,” said Skinner; “a kind of conspiracy against the old man. He’s been edged out and has to go and herd all alone by himself, like an old bull buffalo.”

“Precisely.”

“And,” said Skinner, speaking more to himself than to Honey, “the companionship that the old man longed for will be lost to him.”

“Mac does n’t dare correct him. She always takes the boy’s part, no matter what he does.”

“I see. If he finds any fault with the boy, she thinks that reflects on her training, and resents it.”

“It is n’t that so much as it is the close sympathetic relation between the mother and the boy,” Honey went on. “They have formed a little sympathy league of two, an offensive and defensive alliance. Jimmie is the minor member apparently, but he’s the tail that

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wags the dog all right, and he knows it. You noticed her attitude when he stepped on Sobersides's tail?"

"I noticed Mac's attitude."

"He was disgusted, but he did n't dare say a thing."

"She's got him trained."

"She's got him *cowed*! He would n't admit it, even to himself, but she has. I know."

They were silent for a few moments; then Honey broke out with, "You see, Dearie, it is n't Jimmie's fault, the way he acts."

"Nevertheless," said Skinner, "he's a little beast, and I detest him!"

"Steady, there, steady," Honey cautioned. "Remember, you have a little boy of your own now. For his sake you've got to make allowances for other little boys."

"By jingo, you're right," said Skinner meditatively.

And after that Skinner did n't find it in his heart to hate McLaughlin's boy quite so much. In fact, he did n't find it in his heart to hate him at all until one day, several years later, something happened that brought

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to the surface a sharp reminder of his detestation.

Skinner reached over and let his hand rest on Honey's. He was silent so long that she regarded him curiously for a few moments, then said, "What is it, Dearie? What's my boy thinking about?"

"I don't like that old bull-buffalo-herding-all-alone-by-himself proposition, Honey," said Skinner slowly; "it's a melancholy picture."

"There, there, Dearie, you did n't think I was going to let *you* do that, did you?"

"Oh, no — but — er," — Skinner laughed quietly, — "the rôle's a pathetic one. It does n't appeal to me."

"It does n't have to appeal to you, Dearie. I've got it all fixed."

"You have?" Skinner brightened up. "Tell me all about it."

"You tell me what *you* were thinking about first."

"No, you tell me, Honey."

"All right. First, remember there are n't going to be any cliques in this family. Baby

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Skinner belongs to both of us, share and share alike."

"Fifty-fifty," Skinner corrected.

"Fifty-fifty," Honey affirmed.

Skinner looked over in a corner where Sobersides was regarding them solemnly from under his wiry eyebrows.

"Hold on a bit, Honey. It's three thirds."

"How so?"

"Look," said Skinner.

Sobersides knew they were discussing him, for his tail began to wag slowly, tentatively.

"Come here, Sobersides," cried Skinner; "you're in this."

And Sobersides, having received the formal invitation that he was hoping for, and without which, gentleman that he was, he would never have joined the group, came over, stuck his moist nose into Honey's hand, and then lay down on Skinner's feet, for he wanted to be as near to his beloved master as possible, and stretched his inviolable tail behind him on the floor with perfect confidence.

"Sobersides," said Skinner, looking down, "we've just been discussing an important

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family matter. Did you hear us, Sobersides?"

Sobersides lifted his tail and let it fall again upon the floor.

"We want your opinion, Sobersides."

Sobersides turned and looked up at Skinner and cocked his ears straight at him as much as to say, "Shoot!"

"It will be a strain upon the judicial quality of your judgment, because it involves young McLaughlin. Do you think you could be fair?"

Sobersides absolutely ignored the insinuation against his judicial integrity.

Honey turned to Skinner. "Don't be silly, Dearie. It is n't fair," reaching down and patting Sobersides's head, "you know he's a prejudiced witness. You could n't expect him to form an honest opinion of Jimmie."

Honey fell silent for a moment; then, "Now, tell me, Dearie, what did you have on your mind?"

"It's gone now. What you said drove it away."

"But I want to know."

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"Oh, it was nothing but that old bull-buffalo idea."

"Forget it. There's nothing to it."

"I have. There is."

"We're going to train Baby together," said Honey, after a moment's pause.

"Just how?" said Skinner.

"Why — er — I'll teach him to be good, and you train the man side of him."

"Fine! You teach him how to pray and I'll teach him how to fight."

Honey shook her head and screwed up her nose, showing repugnance. "Boys that fight get black eyes and bloody noses and they get their clothes all mussed up and mud in their ears."

"I don't mean mud in his ears," Skinner protested, piqued that Honey had exaggerated just for effect. "'Mud in his ears'!" he repeated. "I simply mean you teach him how to pray and to take his bath — you know, the moral side of him — and I'll teach him to be decent and polite — and things that will be of use to him in the business world later on."

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"Very good," said Honey.

Skinner leaned over to stroke Sobersides's head. Presently he said, "Of course, there's one thing we both understand—it's obvious."

"What's obvious?" said Honey, a bit apprehensive.

"Why — er — you 'll have to do the — er — spanking," Skinner blurted out.

"Spanking?" Honey opened her eyes wide. "There is n't going to *be* any spanking!"

"The Lord help us if we've got a boy that won't require to be spanked. He would n't be a Skinner."

Honey, rather resentfully, "He would n't be a Rutherford either." She looked straight ahead, very serious.

"I've struck the slats again," Skinner thought. But he was going to stick to his guns this time. The thought of McLaughlin's fate—McLaughlin, the non-assertive—made him firm.

"But it's a man's business to punish a boy," Honey ventured after a bit.

"Not a baby boy," Skinner shot back. He was already primed for this contest.

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Honey looked at Skinner in wonderment at such an argument. "You should teach him very young to respect your authority, Dearie," she said sweetly.

"With words, not with blows."

Skinner felt that he'd made a false step, but he did n't wait long enough to give Honey a chance to break in with an argument. "It's a notorious fact, Honey, that a man's hand is heavier than a woman's, that he can't gauge the force of his blows as she can." He could n't have told why to save his life, if Honey had questioned, but he hurried on, "You would n't have a big fellow like me use all my force to strike a little boy like that, would you, — almost a baby?"

Honey's eyes were flashing.

Skinner felt that he had won, by a cowardly subterfuge, he knew, by specious talk. He had appealed to the mother side of Honey, not to her reason, and he'd appealed successfully. The mere suggestion of a man striking her child was enough. He had won. Skinner felt that he was a coward; nevertheless, he was glad he had won.

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Skinner's real reason for not wanting to spank the child was wholly foreign to the one he had so adroitly urged. He had put the job on Honey just to save his own feelings, for he could n't have struck the boy in a thousand years. Not much! The little fellow was to be his chum and the big chum does n't lick the little chum. They could n't be good pals after that. But Honey was his mother. The boy would realize that it was her business to spank him and he would n't hold it up against her. Besides, mothers had a way of making up with little boys that made them forget.

When the McLaughlins got beyond earshot of the Skinners, McLaughlin opened up on the subject that he'd been brooding on: the Sobersides's loud pedal incident. "Jimmie," he said reproachfully, "you ought not to have trod on that dog's tail."

Jimmie, who had been walking alongside of his mother, being an arch-diplomat, reached up and took her hand and pressed it softly.

"Did you hear what I said, Jimmie?" demanded McLaughlin. He was stern now.

"Oh, yes, he heard what you said."

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“Then why did n’t he answer?”

“Cause you did n’t ask me a question,” said Jimmie quietly, dropping a bit behind so as to keep his mother completely between himself and his father.

“I want an answer anyway,” said McLaughlin.

“For Heaven’s sake, Mac, stop hectoring the child!”

“My dear, I only wanted to tell him that he ought not to have stepped on that dog’s tail.”

“You only wanted an excuse for hectoring him, you mean!”

“I have a suspicion that I know what I mean,” said McLaughlin loftily.

“What do you care about a dog’s tail, anyway?”

“I don’t specialize in dogs’ tails ” said McLaughlin. “But I want to teach Jimmie not to do that sort of thing when he’s out with us. It was n’t kind to the dog.”

“You’re making more fuss about that dog’s tail, Mac, than the dog did himself. He is n’t *your* dog.”

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“It is n’t the dog’s tail. It’s the principle of the thing.”

“No, it is n’t either!”

“It was impolite.”

“Impolite to whom? The dog? How absurd!”

“It was impolite to the Skinners.”

“Impolite to the Skinners?” Mrs. McLaughlin sneered. “Just as if you could be impolite to the Skinners by treading on a dog’s tail!”

“They are very fond of that dog. He’s one of the family.”

“I never heard of such a thing! A dog one of the family! Ridiculous!”

“Well, he is,” growled McLaughlin. “But even if he were a strange yellow dog, and did n’t belong to anybody, it would n’t be kind to tread on his tail, would it?”

“I’d like to see myself making such a fuss over a dog’s tail!”

McLaughlin was silent for a few moments. He knew that he was right, but his wife’s specious reasoning had apparently put him in wrong. He boiled within, but kept his temper

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well in hand. "Now, Lillie," he presently protested, "you know the dog's tail has nothing to do with Jimmie's being unkind."

"I should say it has very much to do with it," Mrs. McLaughlin returned loftily, and little Jimmie, walking at her side, gave her hand an extra pressure to indicate that he thought so, too, which pressure his mother returned, signaling the boy that she was on his side of the controversy, and not to worry, which he did n't.

"Can't you understand,"—McLaughlin returned to the charge after a few moments' boiling within,—"it's the spirit of the thing? It was n't right for Jimmie to step on the dog's tail. He ought to realize that it gave pain to the dog."

"Oh, nonsense! Dogs yelp on the slightest provocation. I won't have Jimmie hectored, Mac, just for the sake of a little thing like that!"

Jimmie did n't quite grasp his mother's logic, but he was willing to be defended, so he said nothing. The burden was on her, let her carry it.

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McLaughlin was silent, but his wife was not mollified.

“It’s absurd to think that all the boy’s pleasure should be checked just because of a dog’s tail!”

“I tell you, it’s *not* the dog’s tail, Lillie, it’s the *principle*!”

“Oh, nonsense! You’re making a mountain out of a molehill!”

And little Jimmie, squeezing his mother’s hand confirmatively whenever she appeared to make a point in his favor, somehow got the idea into his head that there must be something very important in stepping on a dog’s tail.

“Very well,” said McLaughlin, taking a new tack. “But take it from me, for his own sake Jimmie’d better not get into the habit of treading on dogs’ tails.”

“Every regular boy treads on dogs’ tails!”

Little Jimmie gave his mother’s hand a squeeze as much as to say, “That was a corker! Bully for you! I’m going to be a regular boy in that respect hereafter.”

“Every regular boy does n’t tread on the

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same dog's tail twice," protested McLaughlin, and the pressure of little Jimmie's fingers indicated to his mother that he was paying attention. "You let him get into the habit of treading on dogs' tails indiscriminately, and the first thing you know, he'll lose a finger!"

There was a quick withdrawal of little Jimmie's hand. The shot had told.

And now McLaughlin, feeling that he had won his point, became magnanimous. "I know why you don't want to curb the boy, Lillie," he said gently; "you've set your heart on making a dominating man out of him."

"Why not? You're a dominating man. You've always dominated me and the boy."

McLaughlin looked at his wife out of the tail of his eye to see whether she were trying to poke fun at him. It was incredible that she could be serious.

"But —" he started to protest.

Mrs. McLaughlin cut him short. "If Jimmie does n't dominate, he'll be trodden on, kept down like Cousin John."

McLaughlin gave a shrug of annoyance. Cousin John was the one, everlasting, ever-

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present example of everything that was weak, suppliant, downtrodden, unsuccessful.

“You’ve got domination on the brain, Lillie,” he laughed. “Your father was ‘a dominating man,’ your mother was ‘a dominating woman.’ Domination is the breath of your nostrils. A pair of trousers’d make a Cæsar out of you.”

“Better that than a worm!”

“Right-o!” said McLaughlin. “But I’d like to have Jimmie more discreet, less of a bully.”

“A bully! Jimmie a bully! What do you mean, Mac?”

“You know what I mean.”

“I suppose you’d like a kid-gloved boy, a little dancing-master proposition, a sissy!”

“Not necessarily a sissy, Lillie. I only want a decent, gentlemanly boy, one that won’t be hated.”

Mrs. McLaughlin turned sharply on her husband. Her chin was in the air. McLaughlin recognized the danger signal. It had always been used as a quietus. On several occasions their controversy over the child had threatened to result in a clash. If there was

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one thing McLaughlin knew, it was his own temper. He knew when he was approaching an outburst and he always put on the brakes in time, quieted down. But his wife had no such control. He felt sure in his heart that he would be licked in the little controversy, but for once in his life he was going to have it out with her about the boy.

“Yes, if you don’t want him hated, you’d better teach him discretion, anyway.” McLaughlin raised his voice just a little.

“Sh!” said Mrs. McLaughlin. “Don’t shriek so!”

McLaughlin was n’t aware that he had shrieked. He was n’t given to shrieking. He had no touch of the hysterical in his nature. But when he got roused, and had his temper well in hand, he spoke with a positiveness, a deliberateness, that showed that he meant what he said. He went right on.

“A dominating boy may come up against a dominating dog.”

Mrs. McLaughlin stopped short. “Mac, if you say dog’s tail again, I’ll shriek aloud! I will! I will!”

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McLaughlin did n't believe that she'd make a scene, but he did n't dare to chance it. "Very well," he said, "very well." And the little group of two cliques proceeded in sour silence down the street.

As for little Jimmie, he calmly masticated a lemon all-day-sucker that he had purloined from a dish on the table at Skinner's and had secreted in his pocket for the walk home. For, after the Sobersides's loud pedal incident, he had felt that his parents' conversation would not edify him, and he had determined upon this form of entertainment for himself.

It was little scenes like the foregoing, played in the presence of little Jimmie, and always for his benefit, that finally led him to become a full-fledged little bully. And, like all bullies, little as well as big, Jimmie developed a sense of caution. He always sized up the object of his attack. The boy, if it chanced to be a boy, and little Jimmie was n't particular as to sex, must be smaller, or, if bigger, he must be puny or a sissy. A sissy boy, be it understood, was above all others the object of "Bully" McLaughlin's contempt.

## CHAPTER V

### SKINNER BECOMES A DOUBTING THOMAS

NEXT day at the office McLaughlin said to Skinner, casually, "Skinner, how you going to train your boy?"

"Why," said Skinner, "in the regular way, I suppose — school and all that sort of thing."

"I mean home training."

"Honey and I have agreed to train him together."

"They all say that," said McLaughlin.

"But we have a way of our own, something a little different."

Skinner's words wearied McLaughlin.

"Have you started in to do *your* share?"

"Not yet."

"Better hurry up. Honey's got a four years' start of you. She's a mighty clever little woman, Skinner."

"That's all right, Mac, we understand."

"*Do* you? Just wait till you start in to do *your* part of the training." McLaughlin put

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his hand on Skinner's shoulder. "I'm just talking like a big brother, Skinner."

"That's all right, Mac. But you don't think Honey — "

"Any woman's apt to change her mind, Skinner, where her boy's concerned."

Skinner pondered McLaughlin's words. Certainly his partner had cause to be cynical. But the Skinners were different from the McLaughlins. There was a give-and-take understanding between them with regard to the baby. Would Honey live up to it? That was the question that bothered Skinner.

McLaughlin, Skinner knew, gave his son every material advantage. But it was a one-sided arrangement. McLaughlin was getting nothing in return, no companionship, nothing. He, Skinner, would also give his boy every advantage. He would provide for him, protect him, surround him with influences that would tend to make him a strong, happy man and a good citizen. But he was resolved to exercise his claim to the boy's companionship. He realized, however, that the mere fact of being the boy's father, of paying his doctor's

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bills, of buying toys for him or dancing him on his knee was not enough. There must be genuine affection on his part if he would gain the boy's love and hold it.

Skinner also resolved that he was not going to be merely a provider. He would see to it that the boy paid for everything he got, in one way or another. In other words, he must make the child realize their mutual obligations. To do this they must be close associates, chums. But how to do it was the question.

Skinner realized that he had largely outgrown the feelings, the impulses of the child. There was an immeasurable distance between his present state and his childhood. The strenuous life he had led in the business world had obliterated all memories of youthful impulses. He could not suddenly bring Baby up to his point of view of things, so he must meet him halfway and travel with him. He must, by sympathetic observation of the boy, try to recover, get back the impulses of his own youth. Once that was done, they could start even and come along together.

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So Skinner began to take an interest in the things that interested the boy, his toys — woolly lambs, big tin bugs that flapped their wings when one wound them up or pulled a string, colored picture-books with descriptive rhymes, and the like. He found that the smell of a painted rubber ball transported him quicker than any Aladdin's lamp back to the little old-fashioned front dooryard in which he had spent his babyhood. And he kept that rubber ball by him as a first aid to rejuvenation.

Presently Skinner got to be so interested in Baby's affairs that when the youngster wanted to know what made the bug flap its wings, he found himself just as eager to take his knife and pry that bug apart to explore its insides as was Baby to have him do it.

Honey also had a scheme, a scheme for developing the emotional side of Baby. She realized that to do this she must be concrete. She must use an object that Baby was interested in. So she forthwith appointed Sober-sides to a new office: assistant moral and emotional teacher to Baby Skinner.

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This did not greatly tax Sobersides's capacity for work. He had had offices, responsibilities, and honors thrust upon him as numberless and unrememberable as those of an Asiatic potentate. But while the scope of his Pooh-Bahship had increased, he had not advanced a single grade. Also, his pay remained the same. He had his board and lodging, which cost Skinner comparatively little, and his clothes, which cost even less. As a matter of fact, it was an age since he'd changed his collar.

Named in the order of their importance, the Skinner family was as follows: Baby Skinner, Honey Skinner, just Skinner, Sobersides. Baby Skinner, from nothing at all, had advanced to first place, and Sobersides, quite properly, still held down the tail end.

What suggested Sobersides for the aforesaid office was as follows: One day Honey, unobserved, saw Baby, in a temper, slap the dog hard. In return he got a look so reproachful from his friend and protector that he went into a corner and cried with remorse. But presently Sobersides went over to where Baby

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stood, sobbing, and licked his face as much as to say, "What's it all about?"

And Baby Skinner looked at his friend in wonder. Could Sobersides really have forgiven him so soon?

The act suggested to Honey that the psychological moment for a lesson was at hand. She made Baby stand against her knee and look into her face.

"What would you think of a little boy who would hit another little boy whose hands were tied behind his back?" she asked.

"I'd punch him good and hard."

"Supposing he hit a little boy that you loved?"

Baby's eyes flashed.

"You love Sobersides, don't you?"

"Of course I do, mamma."

"You hit Sobersides and his hands are tied behind his back. He can't hit you."

Baby Skinner looked at Sobersides, then stared into his mother's eyes inquiringly.

"He can't hit, but he can bite, mamma."

"He can't bite you. His jaws are tied."

Baby looked at Honey, puzzled.

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“Don’t you understand?” said Honey. “His jaws are tied by love. He could snap your arm off with those powerful jaws of his, but I’ve taught him to be kind to you. He promised me he would n’t bite you, no matter what you did. And he’s too much of a gentleman to go back on his word.”

Baby Skinner was now regarding his mother quizzically. “It’s so funny what you say, mamma, about Sobersides being a gentleman.” He was silent a moment, then, “How did he promise you, mamma?”

“He wagged his tail ‘yes’ when I asked him to promise.”

“Did you promise, Sobersides?” said Baby. Sobersides had approached and stood listening to Honey’s words. And while his dog’s conscience rebelled against the lie, still his loyalty to his mistress overcame his scruples and he wagged his tail a vigorous “yes.”

“See!” cried Honey.

Baby laughed. “That does n’t mean anything, mamma. He always wags his tail. Don’t you, Sobersides?”

Sobersides cocked his head to one side,

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pointed his ears interrogatively at Baby, reflected a moment, and then wagged his tail heartily.

Honey observed that the seeds of kindness thus sown in Baby's consciousness through the instrumentality of Sobersides were sprouting. The little chap was beginning to think for himself. She was also reminded that children are both literal and extreme. For that very night Baby Skinner, for the first time, insisted upon taking his little tin soldiers to bed with him. He could n't bear to think of them out there all alone in the dark, he said — not even the little toy gun. This was well enough, Honey thought, but when Baby insisted on putting his fire engine and his drum and his garden implements under the cover-lid, and making it look like the skyline of a city, she protested. Baby rebelled at first, but compromised on the toy soldiers when Honey assured him that the rest of his little toy friends would be provided with comfortable quarters on an old blanket in a warm closet.

Two days later, Honey heard a baby voice

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raised in high protest in the kitchen and, investigating, found Baby denouncing in shrill accents the act of the cook in ruthlessly exterminating a fly because it could n't hit back.

"Baby is n't old enough to know anything about the moral quality of an act," said Skinner one evening after dinner. "I'll see if I can't make it clear," he went on after a pause. "The other day I saw him do something mildly naughty."

"What was it?"

"I'm not going to tattle. I've been trying to impress upon him so long that it's mean to tattle that I've begun to think so myself, and I'm not going to do it."

Honey looked at him mischievously.

"Not any more," he corrected. "I said to him, 'Why did you do that?'

" 'Cause I like to do it,' he said.

" 'Did n't you know it was naughty?'

"And, bless his heart, the little cuss came over and put his head against my knee and said, 'Papa, I like to do it 'cause it's smart to be naughty!'"

"You see, Dearie, he's gathered from the

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other boys that anything that's naughty is smart, romantic. Boys put a halo around it."

"That's just so," said Skinner. "Now, I'm going to teach him what it really means to be smart."

"Did you yourself ever know what it means?" said Honey archly.

"Not quite, I guess, but I'll teach *him* anyway," Skinner laughed. "And while I'm teaching him, I'll learn how myself."

"He's too little for that yet," said Honey. "Let me have him a bit longer."

Honey's words, "Let me have him a bit longer," had a curiously disquieting effect upon Skinner, once he came to reflect upon them. "A bit longer." She'd had him for more than four years now. What did she mean by "a bit longer"?

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ADVENTURES OF THE THREE PALS

“You know what day this is?” said Honey as Skinner entered the breakfast-room one Saturday morning.

Skinner held up an interrupting finger.

“You beat me to it.”

“It’s Baby’s birthday,” they both cried in chorus.

Skinner gave Honey a hug and a kiss. “Do I know what day this is?” he repeated reproachfully.

“It does n’t seem possible that he’s five years old.”

“Oh, I don’t know. He’s a pretty big boy, Honey. He’s got wits, too, he has, he’s got wits.”

“That is n’t all he’s got.”

“Freckles, you mean?”

“Eh-huh.”

“And he’s got something besides wits and

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freckles, too. Do I know what day this is? Come on upstairs."

Skinner led the way to his dressing-room.

"There," said he, unlocking a drawer, "look there — see those — and see these over here. Do I know what day this is?"

"Oh, be quiet, Dearie, I knew you did."

"And I've got something for you," said Honey when they had returned to the breakfast-room. She rose, crossed the room to a closet, and opened the door. "This is n't the place for such things, but look."

Hanging there were two suits of khaki, one big and one little. Honey reached up and took from a shelf two knapsacks, one big and one little.

"What does it all mean, Honey?"

"I've got it all planned out, planned out in my own little head."

Honey paused.

"Go on."

"It's this," Honey went on. "You are to have Baby all to yourself every Saturday and Sunday. You two are to go away together somewhere, anywhere you like. You're

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to go away every Saturday morning and not come back till Sunday night."

"Every week?" said Skinner, hardly believing his ears.

"Every week."

"Pinch me! Wake me up!"

"Nonsense, Dearie! I mean it!"

"When do we start?" said Skinner, like a boy.

Honey looked at the clock. "You're to be out of the house at nine o'clock. That gives you an hour to put these duds on, 'phone to the office, and make your exit."

"Short notice to map out an adventure," Skinner observed.

"It ought not to be," Honey pouted. "You knew it was Baby's birthday."

"But I did n't dream — er —"

Honey broke in. "Dearie, this is the regular, definite, official beginning of your chumship — nine o'clock this morning." She paused. "You did n't think I'd do it, did you, Dearie? You did n't think I'd keep my word and let you have him all to yourself. You thought I'd be another Lillie McLaughlin, did n't you?"

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Skinner lied like a proper husband and father.

“Not for a minute! Not for a solitary minute!” He was fairly trembling with the joy that was in him.

“Here’s the rest of my scheme,” Honey went on, mollified, but not deceived by Skinner’s reiterated protestations of faith. “It’s understood that you are to be just two boys together. You’re not to consult me. You’re to take to the open road. When you come back, I don’t want you to tell me where you’ve been or what has happened unless you feel like it. And I won’t ask any questions, no matter how muddy you get your shoes or how wet your stockings.”

Skinner stared at Honey.

“Think of it! You’ve been planning all this out in that little nut of yours while I’ve been —”

“Been what?”

“Oh, nothing.”

“But what?” Honey insisted.

“Waiting and hoping for it to happen.”

Then Honey called Baby in and told him

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what they'd planned to do. The spirit of adventure at once possessed the youngster. He did n't stop to say, "Thank you, mamma," or, "How lovely of you to think this all out for me," but made a dash for the hall, grabbed his hat and stood ready for the word "go!"

"Goodness!" cried Honey. "You're not going that way."

She picked up the khaki suits.

"Come to my room, Baby," said Skinner, "and we'll rig up."

When they returned a few moments later, spick and span in their new outfits, and stood with hands to hats in mock salute, Honey inspected them with much gravity, then announced that they'd passed muster.

Peering out from under the sofa where he had retired were the anxious, sorrowful eyes of Sobersides. It was clear the protector of the family had understood what was going on. Sobersides realized that his place was there to take care of things. He was a good soldier. He would n't for worlds embarrass his loving master by any mute appeal, so he had effaced himself, — under the corner of the

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sofa, as usual, — but his great dog's heart was with Baby Skinner in the country, where the wind swept the meadows and the sun baked the perfume out of the spruce trees.

“Come on, my chum, my fellow-adventurer,” cried Skinner to Baby.

Baby Skinner put up his face and Honey bent down and took him in her arms and gave him a tender hug. There was a sob in Honey's throat. She felt almost as if she were relinquishing some claim to her darling. And, in a way, she was enjoying the ecstasy of the sacrifice. But her emotional reflections were cut short by Baby Skinner, whose eyes, looking over her shoulder as she knelt before him, caught the anxious eyes of Sobersides.

“Say,” cried Baby, “ain't Sobersides going with us?”

Sobersides, with ears cocked and expectant eyes, listened for the verdict.

“Don't you think he ought to stay here and protect the house and mamma?” said Skinner.

Baby Skinner was not long on argument. He planted his stout legs apart and set his

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jaw resolutely. "I won't go a step without Sobersides," he declared.

Sobersides felt that this was the right moment to supplement his young champion's plea by his presence. He came out from under the sofa, looking into his master's face, and slowly wagging an uncertain tail.

"Sobersides," said Honey reproachfully, "do you want to go with them and leave me all alone?"

"That's not a fair question to ask a gentleman, Honey," said Skinner.

"I think he's answered it," said Honey, for Sobersides had planted himself with his head on his paws, his nose pointing the street door.

Skinner looked at Honey with a twinkle in his eye. "What'll Sobersides wear if he goes with us?"

Honey affected careful pondering of the subject. "I think what he's got on will do, all right. Don't you?"

"Come on, Sobersides," Skinner cried; "you're elected! Any further instructions, Honey?"

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"You'll find them in your knapsacks."

"I see," said Skinner; "sealed orders."

"Remember, Baby," said Skinner, when the front door had closed behind them, "you and I are chums, we're boys together, pals. Neither one is the boss."

"Yes, sir."

"Yes, pal, you mean," Skinner corrected.

"Yes, pal," Baby Skinner affirmed.

They walked on a few minutes in silence; then Skinner broke out with, "How would you like to go up to the old swimming-hole, in Westchester, where I learned to swim?"

"Great — pal!" said Baby Skinner with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

"That's the talk!" cried Skinner, slapping his chum on the back.

The first obstacle to the success of the expedition was encountered when the railroad folks refused to let Sobersides ride in the passenger-coach.

"I don't see why not," Baby Skinner protested; "he's just as good as those folks in there. He sleeps with me."

"The baggage-car for his," said the stern

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blue-coated official with a finality only known to obtain in the decision of a Supreme Court judge or a railroad porter.

Again Baby Skinner proved that their alliance was no mere scrap of paper. Leave Sobersides chained to a post among a lot of dress-suit cases and satchels and trunks! Not much! He tugged at his father's hand.

“Pal!”

“Yes, pal.” Skinner looked down on his sturdy chum.

“I’m going to ride in the baggage-car with Sobersides.”

“So do I, then,” said Skinner. “You don’t mind, do you?” he added, turning to the baggage-man who stood close by, and that worthy shrugged his shoulders as much as to say, “It’s nothing to me.”

So away they went up into Westchester, Skinner, an important member of an important firm, riding on a trunk in a baggage-car with one arm around each of his chums. As they sat there near the open door, while the landscape waltzed past, Skinner felt a curious sense of freedom. Back in the city, away,

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way back it seemed, he could see McLaughlin and Perkins, the clerks and the typewriters toiling at their desks. And it gave him a thrill just as it used to give him a thrill when he played hookey from school.

When the train reached Bedford Station, the three pals got out. They stood on the platform and watched the tail end of the rear car until it disappeared around a curve in the distance.

“Now,” said Skinner, “shall we get a rig or shall we hoof it?”

Skinner had n’t used the word “rig,” he had n’t even thought of it, for years, but the sight of Bedford Station, the old stores strung along, end-on to Main Street, everything transported him back to the time when he was a little boy and brought back the old expressions.

“What do you mean by ‘hoof’ it, pal?”

“Walk.”

Skinner thrust his hand into his hip pocket and produced a pipe and pouch of tobacco.

“Can we go ‘cross lots?” Baby’s eyes sparkled.

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“If pal has n’t forgotten his geography.”

“All right, then, let’s — hoof it!”

And away they went down the road to a great chestnut tree on the right and a break in the stone fence.

“There’s the ‘cross-lots route,’ ” said Skinner, “the great overland short line.”

It was four good miles to the old swimming-hole and the sun was hot. But there was a dry breeze stirring across the country that rippled the timothy and clover tops and fanned the cheeks of the pals and parted Sobersides’s whiskers and then passed on to perform similar beneficent offices to other travelers. And the trees swayed in fantastic nods and bows of welcome.

At last the three pals reached the top of the hill that overlooked the old swimming-hole. From the north came a shallow brook, tumbling over pebbles, then a sudden depression and smooth water. That was the “hole.” Fifty feet farther on, the brook spread out into another shoal, only a few inches deep.

At the edge of the hole, frisking and dancing about, were a lot of little human frogs, robed

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in coats of tan, with trousers and stockings made of the same stuff.

"Oh, see those boys," cried Baby. He regarded the frogs in wonder; then, "They ain't got any clothes on, right here out doors!"

The human frogs, now that they saw that they had an audience, began to do all kinds of water and land stunts. They turned somersaults, they walked on their hands, they dived into the hole and dragged themselves out over the grassy edge again, all to Baby's huge delight.

The three pals had now reached the edge of the hole and stood watching the antics of the frogs. Presently, Sobersides, being a good mixer, proceeded to make friends with the frogs, wagging his tail and nosing around, and thus brought about general introductions.

Skinner had n't intended going into the water, but his youthful impulses got the better of him. Before he knew what he was about, he found himself unlacing his shoes.

"Let's go in, pal," he said.

And before one could say Jack Robinson, Skinner and Baby had become human frogs.

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Skinner, remembering the deepest point, dived in and "fetched" the entire length of the hole, not coming to the surface till he touched gravel at the lower end. "Come on," he cried to Baby, and Baby and Sobersides joined him there in the shallows and splashed and danced about to their hearts' content.

An hour later the human frogs had dispersed and the travelers had resumed their journey.

Tired and dusty, the three pals halted at a wayside inn for the night. Skinner was about to register, when the eye of the clerk fell upon the four-footed member of the party.

"He can sleep in the room with us, if you don't mind," said Skinner.

"Strictly against the rules," said the clerk, reaching up and stuffing the pasteboard back of his cravat under the points of his paper collar.

"Have a cigar?" said Skinner, passing one across the counter.

The young man put the weed in his top waistcoat pocket next to his glasses case.

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"You see, the old man's dead set against having dogs in the house. Won't stand for it for a minute. We can make a nice place for him in the barn."

Baby Skinner and Sobersides, standing a little bit apart from the others, overheard.

"How about it, pal?" said Skinner, turning to the pair. "Shall we let Sobersides sleep in the barn?"

"If Sobersides sleeps in the barn, I sleep there, too."

Skinner turned to the clerk, who was listening, much amused at Baby Skinner's attitude. "Can you arrange it?"

"For all to sleep in the barn?"

Skinner nodded.

"Honest? You want to do it?"

"It's just a lark with us," Skinner explained. "It's his birthday and I'm showing him a bit of tramp life."

"All right. After supper I'll fix you up."

After supper, Skinner, Baby, and Sobersides were given their room for the night, said room consisting of a great box stall near the stalls of the horses. Across an open space stood a

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row of Holstein cows, their heads secured in curious frames.

Skinner would have preferred the haymow, but the clerk was afraid to risk the displeasure of the boss, who was away on a business trip and might return at any hour. "Besides," said he, "it's as clean as a whistle here. This stall has n't been used for months. We'll chuck a whole lot of fresh hay in it, and I'll give you a lantern and some blankets."

"How do you like it here, pal?" said Skinner, later.

"It's kinder — kinder lonesome an' quiet."

"Perhaps we'd better go to bed."

Baby Skinner burst out laughing. "We have n't got far to go, have we, pal?"

Skinner opened the knapsacks that Honey had prepared. In them he found nightgowns, socks, handkerchiefs, combs, and toothbrushes. In Baby's was a sealed envelope marked, "To be opened at bedtime."

"I wonder what this can be?" Skinner mused.

He tore off the end and drew out a strip of paper which he held up in the dim yellow rays

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of the lantern and read, "Our Father Who art in Heaven."

"Oh, yes," said Skinner, "oh, yes. Curious I should have forgotten," he muttered rather disgustedly. "Why, Baby, lying down to sleep before — Have n't you forgotten something?" And he felt the hypocrite, as he chided the youngster, for he himself had forgotten. "Come, put your face against my knee — you know."

Baby Skinner, half drunk with sleep, struggled to his knees and murmured inarticulately the Lord's Prayer. "Thine be the kingdom and the power and the glory" were almost inaudible.

"Come," said Skinner, giving Baby a gentle shake, "is n't there some more?"

"Now I lay me down to sleep," Baby repeated. He was on the point of suiting the action to the word, but Skinner jolted him softly.

"Is n't there some more? — Poor little devil," Skinner thought, "I hate to make him say it."

"God bless papa and God bless mamma and

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God bless Sobersides — and God give me a clean mind — and a stout heart — and a strong body — and make me a good citizen — for Jesus' sake, Amen.” Baby Skinner was dead to the world!

Skinner tenderly removed the youngster's shoes, loosened the belt of his little khaki trousers, unbuttoned the top button of his flannel shirt, made a cushion of a bit of hay and spread his handkerchief over it, then deposited Baby in his little improvised bed and pulled a corner of the blanket over him.

Skinner did not have to perform a like office for Sobersides, for that gentleman, tired and happy, without even having taken the trouble to pull his boots off, like his master, was fast asleep. Every now and then his feet twitched convulsively and he gave vent to just the merest suggestion of a bark.

“He's nosing out birds in the underbrush of his dog's land of dreams,” thought Skinner.

Skinner did not extinguish the lantern at once. Instead, he sat there listening to the soft noises of the stable and thinking. All

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around and beyond him was darkness. He could hear the cows occasionally switch their tails and he fancied he could hear them chewing their cuds. Every now and then a horse would wake up and begin champing a bit of hay in a perfunctory way and then fall asleep again. It was a wonderful silence, a silence full of great, living things close at Skinner's elbow — a silence that he loved. To be paradoxical, he had n't heard such a silence since he was a little boy.

Skinner picked up the bit of paper with Honey's handwriting on it. He pressed it to his lips. "Give me a clean mind, a clean mind." He pondered the words. Hundreds of times he'd heard Baby rattle them off, at first in little, lisping, halting words, then more articulate. But they'd never meant anything to him, Skinner, never until to-night in the stable, in the dark, in the silence. Baby had never prayed at his knee before. Was that it? he wondered, or was it because they were in a stable — in a stable — "for Jesus' sake" in a stable — "Amen."

Skinner looked at Baby again, Baby sleep-

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ing peacefully, secure, with that benediction resting on him. Then he blew out the light, lay down, rested his head on the improvised pillow next to Baby, and pulled the corner of the blanket over himself. "Give me a clean mind," he repeated; "that about covers everything—a clean mind. That's a great prayer for Baby—and if it's good enough for Baby, it's good enough for me. Give me a clean mind." And Skinner fell asleep with that prayer on his lips.

It was a wonderful night for Skinner, that night in the hay with Baby and Sobersides. It seemed as if by the magic touch of association he'd recovered the impulses of youth.

Bright and early, the three pals took to the highroad again. They rested under great trees whenever they felt like it or took off their shoes and stockings and waded in wayside brooks. At three o'clock they stopped at a village church, where Sunday School was in session, and remained through the service, for Skinner had determined that their adventures should not interfere with Honey's plan for the moral training of Baby. He made this a rule

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and adhered to it during all their subsequent outings.

That evening found the three travelers tired, dusty, and disreputable, every one of them, at a small railway station waiting for the train to take them back to Meaderville.

The only comment Skinner made to Honey that night as he kissed her was, "I feel five years younger, Honey."

"You look it," said Honey.

"And *I* feel five years older," said Baby.

Honey laughed. "The first thing we know, you'll be passing each other."

When Skinner calculated on the unalloyed joys of Baby's companionship, he counted without his host. He found that he himself had entered upon a very strenuous course of mental and moral discipline. Instead of becoming Baby's teacher, he had become Baby's pupil. To his dismay, he realized that his much-vaunted experience in life was a very narrow experience, after all. He had commuted back and forth from Meaderville for years; he knew what it meant to ride in a "club" car. But that was something that

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Baby could learn in an hour. Skinner now began to learn the little, big things of life, or, better, the big, little things of life. For the first time he realized that the child occupies himself with minute, concrete things, and that these things do more to develop his imagination than what men call the big things of life. The bathtub was an ocean to Baby Skinner across which he sent chip ships to foreign shores to trade with strange peoples. The bug meant more to him than the universe. In a way, he could understand the former. At least, he could investigate it.

Skinner first began to realize during the adventures of the three pals that the small boy's curiosity, his instinct for acquiring information, is searching, merciless, not to be evaded by means of any trick or sophistry.

It was during adventure number two, while crossing a field, that Baby came upon a curious bug. He immediately put up a line of questions that confounded his pal. Skinner sought to temporize by evasion. A few days later the youngster appalled his father by an amount of information about that particular

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bug that he and another boy had gathered from a book in the public library. So Skinner, too, began to "post up." But once having committed himself to the process, he found that what had formerly been leisure moments were filled to overflowing with the business of educating himself in order to keep ahead of Baby. No sooner had he posted up on one thing than Baby sprung another thing.

Skinner never caught up. He was always on the alert, on the jump. He found himself being educated along new lines, taking a keen interest in other things than business and domestic economy. He got a microscope, and he and his pal explored the little worlds in the grasses together. They followed the wolf gnat and the elephant beetle to their lairs. They studied the tall grasses on Sobersides's skin. Through the microscope, the feathers on the canary's neck became huge, waving palms. Skinner also got a telescope and together the pals watched the heavenly bodies.

The most important lesson Skinner learned from Baby was the deadly after effect of pre-

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tense or evasion. He discovered that by practicing any subterfuge he let himself in for an endless line of cross-examination. This discovery he made during adventure number three.

It was during adventure number three that the three pals were crossing a field where cattle were grazing.

“Pal!” cried Baby Skinner suddenly, after standing at a respectful distance and observing a huge ox that lay in the shade of a great oak, ever and anon switching its tail to dislodge an insistent fly. “Pal, did God make the ox?”

“Eh-huh.”

“Did God make flies, too?”

“Eh-huh.”

“Does God love the ox, pal?”

“I guess so.”

“Does God love the fly, pal?”

Skinner thought of the voracious fly and the sleek ox. “Apparently,” he said.

Then Baby Skinner sprang one of his “regular ones.” And Skinner expected it. That’s why he’d been dallying with non-committal

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“eh-huhs” and “I guess sos” and “appar-  
entlys.”

“Then why does God make the fly bite the  
ox?”

“To make him pull.”

Baby’s abrupt silence gave Skinner a sense  
of relief.

That night Baby Skinner refused to say  
his prayers. “I ain’t goin’ to pray any more,  
mamma!”

Honey looked at Skinner for enlightenment,  
but his face betrayed perplexity equal to her  
own. “Why not, darling?” she said.

“I don’t like God any more.”

“Why, Baby!” Honey gasped.

“I don’t like God if he makes the fly bite  
the ox.”

“What in the world does he mean, Dearie?”

Skinner related the incident of the ox and  
the fly.

“Now, look here, darling,” said Honey,  
after a pause, “why don’t you ask God not to  
let the fly bite the ox any more?”

Baby, after pondering, and considering  
Honey’s proposition reasonable, prayed the

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good Lord not to let that particular, savage, green fly bite that particular ox any more. Then, after thinking it all over for a day or two, he began to feel sorry for other oxen, and included them also in his nightly prayer. After a time his sympathies assumed universal scope. He prayed the Lord to protect all animals against that particular, savage, green fly.

The next time the three pals crossed the aforesaid field, Baby Skinner hurried to the customary resting-place of his friend, the ox. And there, much to his dismay and sorrow, he beheld a great, savage, green fly feasting on the sleek flank of his four-footed friend. His faith in the efficacy of prayer was shattered. He began to cry.

“What’s up, pal?” said Skinner, astonished.

“Look!” Baby pointed.

Skinner comprehended. “Confound that fly! I’ll kill it right now!” He made a slap at the green gourmand with his hat, but it flew away — as most flies do. “I’ll kill it metaphorically, anyway,” he added, to himself, “and so exorcise, if possible, this spirit of endless interrogation.”

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"Look here, Baby, I don't know why God makes the fly bite the ox. Probably it's for some wise and kind purpose."

"It may be wise, but I don't think it's very kind," Baby Skinner observed. "Do you, pal?"

The incident of the ox and the fly prompted Skinner to guard his tongue very carefully in the future against the loose word or careless evasion. He resolved that if he did n't know the answer to Baby's questions in the future, he 'd own up like a good pal.

Nothing had ever been so beautiful to Skinner as the development of his little boy's mind. It was like the unfolding and expanding of the bud into the flower. And, by suggestion, as Skinner observed the boy, his own nature began to expand, flower. There were hidden things in it, feelings, impulses, the growth of which had become arrested by his very early entrance into the sordid side of life, that now came to the surface, and took on new life. By association with the boy, Skinner could feel himself growing stronger, younger, a rejuvenated man.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE MASTER WORKMAN AND THE POET

WHILE Skinner was congratulating himself that his dreams had been more than realized, that his companionship with his boy was sweeter than anything he'd ever hoped for, and that it promised still brighter things to come, Willard Jackson was sitting alone in his great library in St. Paul, a keenly disappointed man. True, the offspring that Jackson had prayed for in his eminently practical way had been given him. But it was not the boy he had hoped for.

“Sonny” was now eight years old, but he gave no signs of ever developing into a master of men. Jackson had meant that Sonny should be a good mixer, but Mrs. Willard Jackson had seen to it that that was the very thing the boy should not be. Sonny had developed no bent for practical things. The wife had seen to that, too.

As Jackson sat in his great library, alone, he

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could hear a twittering of feminine voices in the big room at the other end of the hall, for all the doors were opened through. Every now and then he recognized Sonny's high-pitched prattle interjected into the general flutter of feminine noises. Then instantly all other sounds would cease. Sonny had the floor. For Sonny Jackson, be it understood, was the son of the most powerful man in the Middle West. Also Sonny Jackson was being brought up as a poet.

Mrs. Willard Jackson had her own little purpose in making a poet, rather than a captain of industry, of her boy. Her husband insisted upon being rough, which she laid to his training, so rough at times as to be quite impossible socially. If he chose, Jackson could purr like a cat. He could be sweet, seductive. But he seldom took the trouble. He preferred the thunderous, sledge-hammer method of persuasion. He knew the psychological value of noise. But Jackson was no bully. He was neither cowardly nor cruel. He was always ready to back up with his fists or his pocketbook anything that his tongue might

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utter. Of the soft-fingered methods of society, he was both contemptuous and indulgent, indulgent on his wife's account. He had always been aware of her social aspirations and had realized that he'd stood in the way of their attainment. He was an obstacle that even his own money could not surmount.

Mrs. Jackson realized that money alone could not secure social leadership. She pondered the matter and presently hit upon culture as the most available running mate for wealth. But she realized that in these days of progress along super-æsthetic lines, the good old-fashioned article was not the thing. It must be cult, rather than culture. Neither was it sufficient to adopt some one else's cult. One must create a cult for one's self.

Mrs. Jackson was clever. She realized that she could n't get the women of the exclusive set to come to her house merely because of Willard Jackson's money; not that they did n't want to come; but that they were afraid of each other's tongues, for Jackson was a vulgarian, you know. And some of the sycophants who now fawned upon Mrs. Jackson

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had been the most unsparing critics of the great workman's social impossibilities.

Vast wealth and influence were no temptation to these ladies. Oh, no! But any cult, no matter how extreme, so long as it suggested culture, was an excuse.

The whole thing was a piece of clever finessing. Mrs. Jackson, social climber, was quite aware that these moderately rich, ten generations deep, patricians were eager to avail themselves of her husband's influence and the magnificent affairs which she was contemplating. There was no doubt that they had many poor relations whom Jackson might put into gentlemanly clerkships. Or they might have some political axes to grind, and her husband's great influence might prove a most effective grindstone. Very good! They needed her influence, she needed their social prestige. It was simply a matter of give and take. But there had been no middle ground on which they could come together. So Mrs. Jackson created a middle ground of her own. She invented a certain super-æsthetic cult, eccentric, extreme, and, by making her son the chief

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exponent of it, thus exploited her own intellectual, cultural, and social qualities.

Willard Jackson's intuition had told him all this, for, like most other men of his rare type, he had the intuitions of a woman. But, for several reasons, he had never opposed his wife's social schemings. In the first place, her happiness was dearer to him than his own happiness. He felt — for he had a keen sense of justice — that by sticking to him as she had done, by holding up his hands through many a hard struggle and trial, she had earned her right to be happy in her own particular way. She had never objected to his going to baseball matches or boxing contests. Why, then, should he dictate her method of diversion?

Above all other considerations with Jackson was his wife's health. She had never been particularly strong. She was temperamental, high-strung, and devilishly inclined to be hysterical. And hysteria with her was no affectation, Jackson knew to his sorrow. Practically the only thing in the world that he was afraid of was that hysterical quality in his wife's make-up.

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The new cult society had been holding its meetings at the Willard Jackson mansion for some months. Jackson had been invited, in a perfunctory way, to attend every meeting. He knew that the invitation was perfunctory, but that was not his reason for not lending his presence. In the first place, he hated everything that he did not understand, and he did not understand cults. In the second place, none of his men friends ever came to the meetings, the men whom he could surreptitiously lure into his den with a big, black cigar or a drink of whiskey. And thirdly, and quite inconsistently, he thought, while the whole thing was supposed to raise beauty and refinement to the *n*th power, the former was sadly lacking in the personnel.

Presently, as Jackson sat there alone in his great library with his feet on the desk and a big, black cigar between his teeth, he heard an ecstatic voice cry out, "But we must have another! I insist upon it! I do insist!"

The master workman took the cigar from his mouth and listened, and as he listened it dawned upon him that after all he might have

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been wrong, that his fierce desire for a successor in his great business — a successor of his own flesh and blood — had warped his judgment. Was he wrong? Had he given himself a great deal of unnecessary anxiety over it all? Did the boy really have talent, that these women should be clamoring for his verses?

Jackson did n't pretend to be a judge of poetry, although as a boy he had fed on "The Heart of Mid-Lothian," "The Taming of the Shrew," Longfellow, Riley, Eugene Field. And a long list of industrial battles through the years had failed to obliterate many of the lines of those geniuses that he had committed to memory. Above all, he loved Scott's lines, "Marmion" and the rest. They had such a royal swing to them. He loved the men who could write such lines. And just now he felt a curious tenderness for them. By jingo, these men had lived for ages! Their names had grown brighter!

Jackson tried to recall some captain of industry of the past. He could only think of Alexander T. Stewart, the great New York merchant. He never thought much of Stewart.

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There was something cold-blooded about him, from all he'd heard. But what a red-blooded man Scott must have been! What warmth he must have had to him!

After all, Jackson wondered, which was more important in the world, a great poet or a captain of industry? Perhaps his wife had been right. Perhaps the boy had genius. And poet was a bigger name to write on a tombstone than millionaire, although it did n't have so many letters in it. After all, the man who makes men laugh is more sweetly remembered than the man who makes them sweat. It might be a bigger thing to be the father of a poet than the son of a magnate.

Yes, perhaps Jennie was right.

Jackson banged his fist on the desk. Great Scott! He'd never heard one of his son's lines. But that was n't Jennie's fault. No, he reflected, it was good-natured of her, she knew his antagonism to that sort of thing and had spared him.

The master workman rose, crossed to the door, tiptoed slowly down the hall, and halted, unobserved, just outside the doors of the great

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room. Opposite these were other great doors, hidden by portières. Jackson took advantage of the noisy flutter in the great room to ensconce himself behind these portières, where he could see without being seen.

Now came a chorus, "We *all* insist. We do *emphatically*!"

Mrs. Jackson nodded sweetly and Sonny stepped to a place in front of the mantel and dropped into a languid pose, slender, golden-curled, velvet-coated, lace-collared, ankle-tied Sonny Jackson. Jackson's heart fell at the sight of the boy in this exaggerated, princeling get-up. It always fell at the sight of him in such a rig.

"Remember," Mrs. Jackson remarked, "this is not so much a new form of verse as it is a new method of making beautiful verses that have intrinsic merit, but which, because of their peculiar lack of refinement, have been avoided. Here's an analogy. The great artist at the piano can take the most dreadful tunes, such as 'Yankee Doodle,' or 'Pop Goes the Weasel,' or 'The Devil's Dream'" (at each title she shrugged her shoulders and winced,

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as if it were repugnant to her super-refined tongue even to mention the names of these good old Yankee classics), "he can take these dreadful tunes, I say, and make them beautiful by bringing out the intrinsic quality that the composer had in his heart, but was never able to express."

"I don't know what the devil she means, but I'm interested," thought Willard Jackson. "There may be something to it. She's clever, mighty clever, I know that. Besides, there's enough truth in what she says to make it plausible."

"It would be hard to improve on the form of verse Sonny gave us last Thursday," exclaimed Mrs. Almeric Baird enthusiastically.

"Such rhythm!" murmured Miss Higgins, almost to herself, but intended for the ears of the wife of the most powerful man in the Middle West.

"But, my dear, the rhythm was only the vehicle for the imagination," cried Mrs. Greeno Wilson.

"And *what* a vehicle!" urged the young sister of Turnbull Wicks, the lawn tennis champion.

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"I don't want to be thought immodest," Mrs. Jackson went on, "but you know I — er — discovered this."

There was a flutter of assent.

"You bet your life you did," said Jackson to himself.

"And Sonny," Mrs. Jackson continued, "has, by the musical deliberateness of his utterance, by his perfect poise and taste, shown how he can lift the most commonplace things or actions into the realm of the poetic and the beautiful."

"Think of it!" enthused Mrs. Greeno Wilson.

"To be definite, concrete," said Mrs. Jackson, "take the words in his poem, 'dog,' 'rat.' Note how he *melodizes* each one."

"'Melodizes' is so daring a word," murmured Mrs. Almeric Baird to her neighbor, loud enough, however, not to miss the ear of the wife of the most powerful man in the Middle West.

"Nobody but a Westerner would have the courage to use it," said Mrs. Wendell Howells of Boston.

"Again," said Mrs. Jackson, "the word

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‘dog’ is abrupt, ugly in itself, but beautiful by association. The word ‘rat’ is ugly by association, but properly intoned is beautiful. The word ‘rose’ is beautiful by association alone. The word ‘fly’ is both hideous and beautiful by association; on the one hand, it might suggest a hideous object; again, aspiration, soaring in the blue. Words *per se* are neither ugly nor beautiful, but made so by what they stand for.”

Jackson thought of some words which he could by no jugglery of fancy make beautiful. They had kept too bad company for that.

“You will observe,” Mrs. Jackson went on, after a pause, “that the lines which might irritate, shock, offend, by their abruptness, if used by the unsophisticated, can be melodized by Sonny’s method of delivery, made beautiful. And it is our business to make *all* things beautiful.” She paused. “Sonny is now going to show you what I mean by reading you some of his own verses in his own way.”

His wife’s prefatory words hypnotized Willard Jackson, as her words had always hyp-

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notized him. They had made him do things, the most unaccountable things. He had an unquestioning faith in her judgment, in her cleverness. So he was keyed up to a high pitch of expectancy. What could this wonderful poem be, or what this method of making something beautiful out of the ugly?

“It’s interesting, decidedly interesting,” thought Willard Jackson, the greatest exponent of efficiency in the Middle West.

Sonny looked all around, as much as to say, “I’m waiting for your attention,” and then began languidly, with a perfect show of indifference:—

“A cat — caught — a rat

(Willard Jackson pricked up his ears and stared hard in the direction of the parlors.)

And hit it — a — bat!

(Long pause, during which Mrs. Jackson smiled triumphantly, indulgently, at her guests.)

A — man — cried — ‘Scat’

And — threw — his — hat

And — hit — the — cat

Which — dropped — the — rat!”

There was a dead silence, then a general rustle of feminine approval. Mrs. Jackson beamed.

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“God!” groaned Willard Jackson, master of men. “God!” With his hands clasped behind him, and his shoulders somewhat bowed, he passed noiselessly down the hall again, entered the library, and closed the door. Then he took a cigar from his pocket, bit off the end sharply, and stood looking down at the figures in the carpet. After a time he dropped into his great chair, put his feet on his desk, and muttered, “Is there no balm in Gilead? Not a d—d bit?”

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE COPPER TOES AND THE SILK STOCKINGS

WHILE the æsthetic side of young Jackson was being developed in St. Paul, away off in a New York suburb, half a continent away, Jimmie McLaughlin grew in legs, stomach, muscle, and prowess. He had now reached the exalted age of nine. It was his boast that he could lick anything in his town that wore shoe leather. There were several boys in the slums of Meaderville that Jimmie did not include in his general invitation to "all comers." But these boys did *not* wear shoe leather—in summer. And, being a true gentleman, Jimmie would only tackle boys of his own class. An unbroken line of conquests had made a bully of Jimmie, and, like all bullies, he had become cruel. His prowess had made him a leader and he had many little sycophants on his staff.

There had grown up two factions in the social set to which young McLaughlin belonged

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in Meadville, and these were quite appropriately designated as the "Copper Toes" and the "Silk Stockings." The Copper Toes were the sturdy little fellows who kicked the toes out of their shoes and knocked holes in the knees of their breeches, were generally disreputable, and boasted that they hated anything that was effeminate.

In many instances, a Copper Toe and a Silk Stocking belonged to the same family, were brothers, just as the sons of the same father and mother often belong to different political parties or churches. In some cases the boys, brothers, would have carried their feud into their own homes had not their parents put an emphatic and effective quietus on that sort of thing. And it very often happened that two brothers, who had fought so valiantly against each other during the day, slept together, cuddled up in the same little bed, sometimes with clasped hands or the arm of one flung affectionately about the other's neck, as they had done when they were mere babies and before the deadly gang warfare had come to blight their young lives. In most cases, how-

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ever, when the youngsters came home at night, tired after the battles of the day, they shut their feud outside as they closed the door, and immediately became stanch allies in defeating the parental inquisition as to battle scars and torn clothes.

The principal reason for the feud between the Silk Stockings and the Copper Toes was that the former were generally the superiors of the latter in their lessons in school and Sunday School. Also, the Silk Stockings were punctilious in their dancing-lessons, while the Copper Toes, on every possible occasion, played hookey. In brief, every unregenerate youngster in the Meaderville inner circle joined the Copper Toes and fought under the banner of Jimmie McLaughlin.

The Copper Toes were superior to the Silk Stockings in the respect that they were organized. Jimmie ruled his cohorts with an iron hand. Any suggestion of insubordination on the part of one of the trembling little fellows was instantly suppressed. They were held together by a double motive: fear of their own leader and contempt for the rival gang.

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The Silk Stockings, on the other hand, were not organized. They operated under a gentleman's agreement for purposes defensive, rather than offensive. They were the young beaux of the neighborhood, the little ladies' men, and were subject to jealousies over the little girls, a thing always destructive of gang cohesion.

The McLaughlins had received many complaints about Jimmie's arrogance, his overbearingness, which complaints, however, instead of having the desired effect, gave Mrs. McLaughlin no end of satisfaction as they proved to her only one thing: her boy was a dominating character. To McLaughlin the reports of Jimmie's behavior were distressing. He hated the idea of the boy being a bully. He would have liked to send him away to a big boy's school, where he would have got much of the nonsense knocked out of him, or where, if he should win out, it would be through genuine merit and not through the bullying of small boys. But Mrs. McLaughlin would not stand for anything but a private school right in the neighbor-

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hood, where she could keep a supervising eye on the lad. So what could McLaughlin do?

It so happened that while Willard Jackson, half a continent away, prayed for the deliverance of his boy from "sissydom," McLaughlin prayed that some good angel would rescue his boy from "bullydom." And neither one dreamed that a wise Providence, which is above all things efficient, would use the same agent in answering both prayers — namely, Baby Skinner.

Baby Skinner was neither a Copper Toe nor a Silk Stocking. Both sides had sought to enlist him, but he sturdily maintained a middle course. So popular was he that at one time the Copper Toes, led by one little Julian Devereaux, who had been made the object of some cruel disciplinary measures on the part of Jimmie McLaughlin, had conspired to depose their leader and put Baby Skinner in his place. But Baby Skinner had declined, much to Julian's disgust.

That night Baby Skinner told his father all about it. "Julian Devereaux wanted the

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boys to put Jimmie McLaughlin out and make me captain of the gang."

"The *what?*?" said Skinner.

"The gang," said Baby Skinner innocently, opening his eyes wide.

"I see," said Skinner. "And did you do it?"

"No, of course not."

"Why?"

"I told Julian I would n't do it, 'cause my father and Jimmie's father were partners."

"That's the talk," said Skinner. "Bully for you!" Then, "Did Jimmie find it out?"

"Yes. One of the boys peached on Julian."

Honey, who was reading, looked up, knitting her brows. "What did you say, Baby?" she said.

Baby Skinner knew the particular word his mother objected to, but he affected ignorance.

"I said one of the fellers peached on him."

"No, but what was that particular word that you used?"

"*What* particular word, mamma?"

The youngster opened his eyes wide and

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Skinner repressed a chuckle, as he always did when Honey and Baby were fencing.

“*The particular word*,” said Honey.

“*The particular word?*” Baby repeated.  
“But what particular word, mamma?”

Honey was exasperated. “You know perfectly well, Baby.”

“But if I knew, mamma, I would n’t ask you which word you meant, would I?” thus saving himself from a direct falsehood.

“Baby,” said Honey sternly, “answer me, yes or no! Do you know the word I mean?”

“All — all the boys use it, mamma.”

“Use what?”

“‘Peached’!” Baby admitted. It was like pulling a tooth.

“Now, don’t you know it’s wrong?” Honey began.

“And what did Jimmie do to the boy who peached on Julian?” said Skinner quietly.

Honey regarded Skinner reproachfully. “I don’t see what good it does for me to try to teach him if you — er — ”

Skinner crossed over to Honey and stroked her hair gently. “Our boy has got to asso-

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ciate with other boys. And if he does, he's got to know their language, you know. Besides, *peached* is n't such an awful word. I can think of lots that are worse."

Here Baby broke in with a compromise. "Mamma, I'll never say *peached* again—where you can hear me."

Skinner looked at the wall. Honey looked at her book for a moment. Then Skinner went back to his seat and resumed the inquisition.

"And what did Jimmie do to the little boy?"

"I don't want to tell."

"All right," said Skinner.

Skinner was pleased that Baby was living up to the little code of ethics he'd formulated for him the day he put on his first trousers. The very first of these was, never to peach on a pal. Skinner smiled as he thought how they'd shaken hands on it as man to man.

A few days later, Baby Skinner positively refused to go out to play.

"But why?" Skinner urged.

"I don't want to tell."

"Why not?" said Skinner.

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“Cause you told me never to be a tattle-tale.”

This was something of a poser. When Skinner had laid down the law against tattling, he had meant tattling to one playmate about another. But he had n’t made it specific, and small boys are nothing if not specific.

“You can tell *me*.”

“But won’t that be tattling?”

Clearly, Skinner was up against it.

Presently he said, “Don’t you remember I told you that you could always tell everything to your mother?”

“Ye—es, you said I could tell her ’cause she’d never tell anybody an’ it would n’t get any farther. But it would n’t do you any good, papa, ’cause she could n’t tell you.”

“She could advise you what to do.”

“But it would be tattlin’, just the same, would n’t it?”

It was clear to Skinner that the little fellow was trying to find an excuse for the evasion of the law his father had laid down. “Look here,” he said, “you were a little boy when we made that bargain about tattling. Now,

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you're getting to be a big boy. You can tell me."

"But is n't tattlin' just the same in a big boy as it is in a little boy?"

Skinner gloried in Baby's loyalty to principle. But the whole thing seemed so absurd. Evidently he had builded up a wall between them by this rule that he'd laid down. "You 're right," he said presently. Then after a pause, "If you don't want to play with the boys, you don't have to. Supposing you run out in the back yard and tell Sobersides all about it. He's out there resting."

When Baby had gone out to pour his secret into the wise, hairy ears of Sobersides, Skinner and Honey took counsel together.

"I wonder why he does n't want to go out and play?" Honey asked anxiously.

"He evidently has a good reason," said Skinner.

"What makes you think so?"

"Because he would n't tell me what it is."

"I wonder if he'd tell me," said Honey, looking toward the door.

"No use trying," said Skinner.

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Again they were silent, then Skinner looked up. "By Jove, I've got an idea!"

"What is it?" said Honey.

"I think I'll take a stroll," said Skinner.

"Oh, is that it?"

"Not all of it."

Skinner lighted a cigar, took his hat and stick, tapped Honey on the cheek with his forefinger by way of adieu, and went out. The second block down the street he turned to the left. As he had hoped, on the porch of the third house on the right sat a little boy, alone, little Julian Devereaux, the arch-insurgent of the Copper Toes.

"Hello, Julian," said Skinner, pausing.  
"Waiting for somebody?"

"No," said Julian moodily.

"Why are n't you out with the boys?"

Julian shrugged his shoulders. Insurgent he might be, but gang loyalty forbade his discussing gang affairs with an outsider.

Skinner felt humiliated that he should try to get information from this small source. But the exigency justified it, he thought.

"Julian," said he, "it's a hot day. I think

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I'll go down the street and get a plate of ice cream. Ask your mother if you can come along."

Julian's moodiness instantly departed. He dashed into the house.

The arch-insurgent was halfway through his ice cream before he began to talk. If Skinner was a schemer, little Devereaux was an opportunist. But he was not so casual as Skinner; he was more to the point. Here was a chance to give Jimmie McLaughlin a jab in the ribs most effectively. Skinner's scheming and little Devereaux's opportunism dovetailed into each other beautifully.

"Say," was the first thing he said, "where's Baby?"

"He's home playing," said Skinner.

"If I was him I would n't play no more with Jimmie McLaughlin."

"Why not?" said Skinner. "They're great friends," — then he added, tentatively, "are n't they?"

"Friends? I guess not. Jimmie picks on him all the time."

"You don't say so!"

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"An' Baby never done anything to him same as I have."

"Same as you have?" said Skinner, by his affectation of sudden interest stimulating the desire to boast on the part of the small boy.

"Why, don't you know? I was goin' to put Jimmie out an' make Baby Skinner captain an' I was goin' to be first mate. Some one o' the fellers peached. Gee, but I'd like to know who it was!"

"What did Jimmie do to you?"

Julian regarded Skinner out of the side of his eyes and grinned.

"Say, what *did n't* he do to me?" Then he grew serious. "But that's no reason why Jimmie should pinch Baby an' tease him. I told him Baby had nothin' to do with it."

"Pinch Baby?"

"Yep! He pinched his arm yesterday an' made him yell an' he tried to make him promise that he would n't be a leader an' Baby would n't promise an' then Jimmie twisted his arm this way," — indicating, — "an' Baby pulled away an' ran home an' I went home, too."

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“I see,” said Skinner. “He only pinched him once?”

“No, he’s pinched him lots of times before.”

“I see,” said Skinner.

## CHAPTER IX

### SKINNER GETS AN IDEA

SKINNER was not so calm when he related his interview with Julian to Honey.

“Do you know,” said Honey, “I’ve suspected it for some time.” Her eyes filled with tears. “But how did you worm it out of Julian?”

Skinner had been eminently successful in his little detective mission, yet what he had found out had left him irritable, sensitive to offense. He resented Honey’s words. “Worm it out? I did n’t worm it out!” He snorted with disgust. “Please don’t accuse me of going around worming gang secrets out of small boys. That is n’t my business!”

¶ Honey stroked Skinner’s arm with her soft palm, soothingly. “I did n’t mean it that way, Dearie.”

“That’s all right, but you have an unfortunate way of using certain words that I don’t like when applied to my actions. It always rubs me the wrong way!”

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"I do?" exclaimed Honey, wide-eyed.

"You *know* you do!" Now that Skinner was on the subject of irritating words, he was going to have it out. "The other day you asked me laughingly — and that made it all the worse — how it was I could sneak upstairs so softly that even a dog could n't hear me. I don't like that word 'sneak'! I never did! I wish you would n't apply it to anything I do. I don't sneak upstairs. I don't have to! Sneaking, also, is not my business!"

Honey did n't retort this time. She realized that Skinner was perturbed about the boy. She acquiesced. Acquiescing was an art with Honey.

"Another thing," said Skinner. "You sometimes use the word 'snoop' in connection with me. I don't like that, either!"

"I use the word 'snoop'! Why, Dearie, how could I use such a word in connection with you?"

"Well, you did, all the same. You told me I had a way at times of snooping into the boy's affairs."

Honey remembered the circumstance per-

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fectly. She was almost bursting with laughter at this list of exaggerated grievances, but she covered her mouth with her hand and affected great seriousness, even reproachfulness, when she spoke. She knew that when Skinner got over his mild grouch they'd laugh over it together — when she told it back to him. But this was a time for acquiescing. "Well, if I *did* say that, I must have done it just to tease you."

"I know," said Skinner. "But it is n't right! I don't snoop! You know it. It suggests a petty, sly, unmanly, spying-out way of doing things, just like sneaking or worming things out!"

"Of course you don't snoop, Dearie."

Skinner looked at Honey. "Tell me, Honey, do I ever snarl?"

Honey saw that this was a good way for Skinner to work off his grouch. "You sometimes raise your voice, but you don't snarl."

"Well," said Skinner, mollified. He was silent for a moment, then burst out, "I won't stand for it any more! You must speak to Mrs. McLaughlin, Honey!"

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Honey looked at Skinner in amazement.  
“You can’t be serious, Dearie?”

“Why not? It’s a very serious matter. We can’t have Baby pinched and his arm twisted like that. We can’t have him subjected to all sorts of petty tyrannies and torments!”

Skinner started to raise his voice high.

Honey put up her finger. “Don’t raise your voice, Dearie.”

“I’ll try not to. But you must speak to her.”

“But — but, think!”

“Think nothing! Don’t be a moral coward, Honey!”

“I know. But is n’t there some other way? Can’t we keep Baby home? — let him play in the yard with Sobersides?”

“What?” exclaimed Skinner, with a greater show of virtuous indignation than was necessary, “keep my boy away from the other boys like that? Let any boy practically drive him away from his playmates? You *must* speak to her!”

Honey, very quietly, “Now, don’t raise your voice.” Then, sweetly, “Mrs. McLaughlin is terrible when she gets angry.”

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“You’ve never seen her angry?” said Skinner, surprised.

“No — but I’m quite sure she would be.”

“You must never take anything for granted like that, Honey. Very likely she’d thank you for putting her wise.”

Honey burst out into a laugh of wild derision, at which Skinner was greatly annoyed.

“Please don’t laugh like that. This is no time for it.”

“*Thank* me for it? Oh, Dearie, how little you know!”

This also did not serve to mollify Skinner.

“But *I’d* thank you.”

“I know, Dearie, but you’re not Mrs. McLaughlin.”

“It’s the same thing.”

“Oh, *is* it?”

“How can you object, Honey? Remember, our baby pinched, his arm twisted, bullied!”

“I know what would happen if I spoke to her about it,” said Honey miserably. “She’d flare up, she’d accuse me of butting into children’s affairs, she’d be downright insulting. I’m afraid, positively afraid of her, Dearie.”

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"I can't make out such a thing."

"Oh, *can't* you?" Honey paused. "Supposing you go and tell her."

"*I?* Go to Mac's wife? It would n't be chivalrous! It would n't be the thing!"

"Oh, indeed! Then why don't you go to Mac?"

Skinner drew a big breath.

"He'd be thankful, of course, you know."

"But — er — it's different," Skinner stammered. "We're — we're business partners — it's very important that our relations should remain thoroughly amicable."

"But think of it! Our baby pinched, his arm twisted, bullied!"

"It would never do for partners to quarrel about their children, I tell you. Besides," — Skinner raised his voice again, — "don't you see, Honey, this is a business for *women* to settle?"

"No, I *don't* see it! There is n't a particle of logic in what you say, Dearie."

"Huh!" said Skinner with a certain finality. "I've always been *considered* logical."

"Of course you have, Dearie. But the ques-

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tion is, what are we going to do about Baby's having his arm twisted like that?"

"It looks as if he'd have to work out his own salvation," said Skinner; but he was thinking hard.

"You mean fight it out himself?" said Honey presently. "How can a little fellow like him fight it out himself?"

"Why, other boys fight—all little boys fight—they—er—" Skinner's eyes twinkled. "By Jove! I've got an idea!" He got up, thrust his hands in his pockets, and strutted up and down the room. "Just leave it to me, Honey! Leave it to me!"

And Honey, acquiescent little wife that she was, having an abiding faith in Skinner's ability to work things out, and in her heart thankful that she had escaped the ordeal of going to Mrs. McLaughlin, was satisfied to leave it to Skinner.

All the next day Honey tried to worry out a scheme whereby the petty differences of the two boys could be patched up. She hated to think ill of young McLaughlin. But it was so mean. Baby was a sturdy lad, to be sure, a

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stout little fellow, but, even so, he was two years younger than Jimmie. And Jimmie was large for his age, at that. Honey was a peace-loving woman. She abhorred anything like a scene or a quarrel. She'd rather have died than go to Mrs. McLaughlin with any complaint about the latter's son. But she had the courage of both the mother and the wife. While she schemed to invent some conciliatory but effective tactics that might mend matters, she determined that her boy should not be made to suffer. Nor would she permit her husband to be placed in an embarrassing position with his partner.

Although Honey felt that Skinner would find a means to patch up matters, and at the same time obviate any unpleasantness, dutiful wife and mother that she was, she continued to worry. Therefore, she was greatly pleased when, that evening, after Skinner had kissed her and given Baby a hug and grabbed Sober-sides by the nose and shaken it heartily, much to that gentleman's gratification, he exclaimed, "Well, Honey, I found a way out!"

Honey did n't have to ask. She knew what

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he meant. And she also knew that the great bundle he had under his arm had something to do with it.

"Get the scissors and cut the string," Skinner cried.

Honey did so quickly, and to her amazement there tumbled out upon the floor a complete set of boxing-gloves, two little ones and two big ones.

"You know what they are?"

Honey shook her head, and Skinner, picking up one of the gloves, softly tapped her cheek with it, and slapped Baby on the top of the head, and gave Sobersides a dig in the ribs.

Honey gradually opened her mouth. "Why, Dearie, they're *boxing-gloves!*"

"Right-o!"

"B-b-but what are you going to do with them?" Honey asked slowly.

Skinner lifted his eyebrows and pursed his lips. "Oh, it's a matter of preparedness. War has been declared — or — *will* be declared, you know."

"Dearie, just what do you mean?"

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"I told you I'd find a way out. Don't you understand?"

Honey understood only too well. "But must he really fight, Dearie?"

Skinner laughed. "Goodness, no! Just give him the reputation of being a boxer, and they'll let him alone. He won't have to."

"It's just for psychological effect, is n't it?" said Honey, relieved.

"Right-o!" said Skinner. "But when I was a boy, psychological and physical looked very much alike to me."

"You're just trying to be smart, Dearie."

"Come on, Baby," cried Skinner, "put on the mitts!"

Honey pouted.

"Don't say '*mitts*'!"

Baby went to it in great glee, and in a few minutes they had the gloves adjusted.

"Come on!" cried Skinner. "Put up your dukes!"

"Heavens!" cried Honey, "what are you talking about? '*Dukes*'!"

But Honey's boys were too eager to start the game to pause under maternal protest.

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Skinner was down on his knees, and Baby, with his fists up, pranced about in front of him, as if jockeying for position, in a manner that suggested to Skinner that the little chap had seen that sort of thing done before.

Sobersides stood by and acted as referee.

“Stop a bit,” said Skinner. “Before we begin, I want to tell you what you’re going to fight for. Now, listen. Mark what I say.”

Baby clapped his hands to his sides at attention.

“Now, mark,” Skinner emphasized, “all the world hates a bully! All the world loves a regular boy! Now, what’s a regular boy?”

Baby paused, shamefacedly.

“Come, tell me. I’ve taught you.”

Slowly Baby repeated: “A regular boy is a boy that’s kind to little girls an’ protects ’em. A regular boy is a boy that learns to fight so he’ll never be afraid of a bully or a boy that’s bigger than he is. A regular boy, even if he is a little boy, when he learns to box is a better man than a bigger boy that can’t box.”

During the whole of Baby’s speech, Sober-

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sides wagged vigorous approval with his inviolable tail.

“Now, mark you,” Skinner went on, “you don’t want to pick a quarrel with anybody, even after you *have* learned to box. Only bullies and ruffians do that sort of thing. Do you understand?”

“Yes, sir,” said Baby Skinner.

“Now, here’s another. Don’t let yourself get into any fight, even if you’re picked on by a bigger boy, you understand, until you’ve learned to box. See?”

“Yes, sir,” said Baby Skinner.

“Here’s another. When you have learned to box and a bigger boy should pick on you,—that is, if he should pinch you or tease you or twist your arm,—sail into him if he’s as big as a house. Let him have it. And when you hit, hit quick, with all your strength. And aim for his nose.”

“Yes, sir,” said Baby Skinner.

Honey stood by, wide-eyed. “Why, Dearie, what do you mean?”

“Oh, those are only the rules that go with the game.”

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“But it seems to me as if you were making *special* rules.”

Skinner looked at Honey significantly for a moment, then said, “I am!”

Honey understood. And Honey, gentle, lovely Honey, dainty, delicately reared Honey, felt a tingle of pride from the roots of her hair to her toes that she was the mother of a man child — a man child who could “put up his dukes.” But she did n’t tell Skinner that. Instead, she said, “Well, teach him that if he can’t be good, he must at least be cautious.”

“You’re on!” said Skinner. Then, turning to Baby, “Now, what’s your motto?”

Baby Skinner drew himself up and looked his father straight in the eyes. “I ain’t afraid to pray an’ I ain’t afraid to fight!”

“Come on!” cried Skinner, joyfully; “get ready!”

And at it they went, back and forth, Skinner patting the boy in the face with the tips of his gloves, to Baby’s great glee, and then ducking and getting a wallop on the top of the head from Baby; and Sobersides wagging his tail in great excitement. Although really in sym-

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pathy with Baby, Sobersides, having too rigid a sense of neutrality as referee, refrained from barking his exultation whenever his little chum scored a point.

"Now," said Skinner, when he thought they'd had enough, "repeat your motto."

"I ain't afraid to pray an' I ain't afraid to fight!" cried Baby. With that he hauled off and caught Skinner a good one on the jaw. And Sobersides, immensely pleased at the trick that his young master had played on his old master, gave vent to one or two subdued barks; then, feeling that he'd committed a grave breach of neutrality, he retreated to his customary asylum under the corner of the sofa.

That night when Baby had gone to bed, Honey cried softly on Skinner's shoulder.

"What's the matter?" said Skinner presently, for he suspected that Honey was weeping just for effect.

"Dearie, won't you be careful what you teach Baby?"

"Look here, Honey," said Skinner severely, "you and I agreed that you were to teach him

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how to pray and I was to teach him how to fight."

"You said you'd train the man side of him."

"Well, that's fighting, is n't it? What did you think it was, dancing or reading poetry?"

"You know I'm trying to make him refined."

"But you don't want to refine all the boy out of him. That's a good, all-round motto of his, praying and fighting. Oliver Cromwell did it and George Washington did it."

"Yes, but they were n't Baby Skinner, Dearie."

"Not exactly. Particularly George Washington."

"Don't be funny."

"Look here, Honey," Skinner patted her cheek gently, "I did n't interfere when you were teaching him how to pray, did I?" Honey was silent. "Then don't you interfere when I teach him how to fight."

"That's different," Honey argued.

"They're both along the same lines," said Skinner, — "preparedness."

Skinner and Baby sparred day by day, and Baby presently became so proficient that he

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could deliver quite a staggering blow whenever he caught his father's guard down. From the beginning of Baby's boxing-lessons, Skinner scrupulously avoided mentioning Jimmie McLaughlin by name as having any connection with the new preparedness scheme. But he indicated his purpose by innuendo. Also he stated hypothetical cases. His words, "Any boy that's older and bigger than you are," "any boy who picks on you," reiterated again and again, fixed it firmly in Baby's mind that Jimmie McLaughlin was to be the object of his fistic skill. No other deduction was possible—Skinner saw to that. Jimmie McLaughlin was the only boy who filled the bill completely. He was the only older and bigger boy who picked on Baby Skinner.

"You see, Baby," Skinner impressed upon him, "I've taught you never to tattle on your playmates. As you can't tattle on them, you can't come to me to help you in case any of them pick on you. So it's only right that I should teach you to take your own part. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Baby Skinner.

## CHAPTER X

### THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT

ONE morning the partners of McLaughlin, Perkins & Skinner had a conference of vital importance.

“What did you find out, Skinner?” were McLaughlin’s first words, when the three had seated themselves and all the doors were closed.

“It’s just as you said, Mac. The Starr-Bacon people have got that big lot over in Newark.”

“I thought so.”

“Whose name is it in?” said Perkins.

“It’s in the name of a fellow — G. W. T. Bingham. He’s the brother-in-law of Bacon’s private secretary. I knew him when I was a boy. We used to call him ‘Alphabetical’ Bingham.”

McLaughlin looked at Perkins.

“You were right, Mac,” said the latter.

“Of course I was. I knew that nobody else would be after that particular piece of land

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right close to the Hackensack Meadows. Your friend Bingham has n't any money, has he, Skinner? He would n't be buying it for himself?"

"He never had fifty dollars at one time in his life. He's the dummy."

"Don't that cinch the whole thing?" said McLaughlin.

"Just how?" said Perkins.

"I told you that big order for machinery that Billings & Co. have been working on is n't for Gridley, but for S.-B. I got it straight. Never mind how."

"They stole a march on us, all right," interrupted Perkins.

"We were a bit somnolent," remarked McLaughlin, puffing his cigar. "But we must find a way out."

"If we don't, we'll go under, to be quite frank with you," said Perkins.

"I would n't go as far as that, Perk," said McLaughlin, the eternal optimist.

"Why not?" said Perkins. "They've got a six months' start of us. Don't you think so, Skinner?"

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"I'm afraid so," said Skinner. "The deuce of it is, how they got it."

"Pussy-footing, pussy-footing," said Perkins.

"Six months is n't eternity," said McLaughlin.

"You'd think it was if you were just starting in to get ready to meet the other fellow and he was going ahead full speed, taking all your customers away."

"The only way to do is to get busy. Meet them! Meet them!" McLaughlin waved his hand emphatically.

"But how can we?" said Perkins. "Where's the money? We've gone the limit with the banks. I don't know of any Wall Street man that would lend the cash to back up a big competitive fight, especially where the other fellow's got a six months' start."

"It'll take two hundred and fifty thousand dollars at the least," said McLaughlin quietly. "We could n't get that much on all of our houses, could we, Skinner?"

"It's perfectly clear," said Skinner, ignoring McLaughlin's question, "that the sole

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purpose of the Starr-Bacon people is to get Willard Jackson away from us — just as we got him away from them."

"Just as *you* did," McLaughlin corrected.

Skinner smiled an acknowledgment.

"I would n't say it was their *only* purpose," said Perkins.

"Of course it is," said Skinner. "Jackson's business amounts to more than all their other customers' put together, same as it does with us." He laughed. "You might almost call us a subsidiary to Jackson's principal company."

The partners fell silent.

Presently Skinner broke out with, "I've got an idea!"

McLaughlin and Perkins regarded him anxiously.

"Why can't we get Willard Jackson to form an alliance with us — come into our concern here — be one of us — put up the money?"

"That's a dangerous game," said McLaughlin. "If Jackson had any inkling we were in this fix and needed his money, he'd play us against the Starr-Bacon people and make us all sweat. He'd make his own terms,

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and his own terms would be very, very strenuous terms. *I know.*"

"Can't help it," said Skinner. "We've been caught napping and we've got to pay."

"I'm afraid we'd have to make a ruinous concession," said Perkins.

"Quite so. But what are you going to do about it?" said Skinner.

"I can't handle him, the devilish old grouch, neither can Perk," said McLaughlin, "but he's very fond of you, Skinner. You might get him to stand by us."

"You think he'd do it for sentimental reasons?" sneered Perkins, who had a vivid memory of a very strenuous half-hour he had once spent with Jackson.

"Certainly," said McLaughlin, "certainly." He turned a severe eye on Perkins. "Perk, you know a good deal, thanks to your Harvard training. But there's one thing you don't know — human nature. You never did. Take it from me, it means a heap in business." McLaughlin paused. "For instance, I used to go into this cigar store next door to get my smokes. Now I go way up to Broadway and

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down a block. Why do I take all that trouble? One shop's just as good as another. Simply because I don't like the clerk in one shop, and I do like the clerk in the other. *Personal!*"

Perkins shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, that's only a small thing."

"It's the same in big things," said McLaughlin. "Willard Jackson is very fond of Skinner. Anybody can see that. He likes Mrs. Skinner. He told me how comfortable they made him when he was here last. He said he'd felt more at home in their cozy little place than he'd felt for years in that great palace of his out in St. Paul, and he bragged about the pumpkin pie he got at Skinner's. Ain't that sentiment? Ain't it? And he's just dead stuck on Skinner's boy!"

"Well, if you call pumpkin pie sentiment—"

"Oh, rats!" McLaughlin broke in. "Talk business. We're in a hole. We know we are. The only thing is, how to get out of it."

"Go ahead! Go ahead!" said Perkins loftily. "I'm not standing in your way. Find a way out. I hope you can. It suits me, all right."

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"Skinner can do it," said McLaughlin.

Skinner laughed. "I can't guarantee to get us out of a hole, but I can guarantee that I'll do the best—the very best I can. You give me full power, Mac?"

"Go as far as you like."

"That's it," Perkins endorsed. "Go as far as you like."

There is always such a thing as the psychological moment. Such moments are constantly occurring, if we only knew it. Psychological moments are more often blundered upon than recognized. The genius is the man who recognizes such a moment and avails of it. While McLaughlin and Perkins and Skinner were plotting to bring Willard Jackson into their particular fold in a special way and for purposes of their own, they had no knowledge that there were certain influences operating with him which would give their proposition a peculiar appeal at that moment. Willard Jackson, we know, was deeply disappointed at the way his wife was bringing up Sonny. But he kept his disappointment to himself. To the outside public, he appeared to enter heartily

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into his wife's every scheme for the development of the boy's poetic genius. He endorsed what she did, unqualifiedly. Right or wrong, she was his, Willard Jackson's, wife. Sonny Jackson was his boy; the honor of the family rested on him. Touch his boy and you touched Jackson. Back of that boy was all his father's power and wealth and personal pride. Jackson had hoped against hope that after all his wife might bring something really fine out of the boy along poetic lines. But, after his adventure behind the portières the day of the meeting of the new cult society, he realized that her scheme was a colossal folly.

For once in his life the great master workman was stumped.

Jackson could n't figure out any way to bring his boy back to the normal, to make a *regular* boy of him. He realized that his wife's ambition was just beginning to bear fruit, and the further development of the boy along these lines was necessary to her happiness. He felt that he, Jackson, was to blame. He might have taken a stand at the beginning. But he had n't. It was his fault. And now

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that she had builded so on it, he could n't start in and violently damn the whole process, for that would wound her deeply, wound her in a way she might never get over.

So Jackson admitted to himself that he was up against it, and quite as frankly prayed for a deliverer. It was this state of mind in Jackson, occurring at a time when the partners of McLaughlin, Perkins & Skinner were in dire need of his help, which produced the psychological moment. He was in just this state of mind about his boy when he received a letter from Skinner setting forth that his firm designed extending their plant to keep up with the requirements of the war period, that they should require a considerable addition to their capital to do this, and it had occurred to them that as he, Jackson, used an immense quantity of their material he might be willing to go in as a "special" in their concern, and that they would enter into an agreement whereby he would be able to get their material at exceptionally low figures.

Skinner's letter appealed to Jackson as a fair business proposition, but it was not of

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vital importance to him, for he knew if these people could n't deliver the goods, the Starr-Bacon people could. The operations of any one of his concerns would not be held up because McLaughlin, Perkins & Skinner required extra capital. At any other time he would have written a polite letter declining the offer. But this was not a normal time. This was a psychological moment, a moment which the partners had blundered upon, but which they afterwards flattered themselves they had recognized, with rare perspicacity, and availed of.

Furthermore, the letter was signed by Skinner, personally. Now, Jackson liked Skinner, liked him because he was different from other men. Jackson had lived among sordid men, who talked about nothing but money all the time, whereas Skinner had talked wholesome nonsense outside of business hours. Again, Skinner was such a clean, optimistic, wholesome man. He had such an abiding faith, such a splendid faith in men. Jackson reflected that even if Skinner's faith were not wholly justified, still it was a good faith, a faith that made for success. It was a wise

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man's faith. Yes, Jackson thought, it was the faith of any one but a fool.

Jackson began to think how refreshing it was to talk to Skinner, what good company he was. There came back to him, like a breath of fresh air from the mountains in his great, gloomy library, the memory of the Sunday he had spent at the Skinner home in Meaderville. He laughed as he remembered his astonishment when he saw a dish of which he was very fond brought onto the table; how Honey had bragged that she had prepared it with her own hands; how he'd marveled at the coincidence of their having that particular dish the very day that he should be there; how Skinner had at last gleefully confessed that it was all a put-up job; how he, Skinner, had with wonderful craft searched out the fact that he, Jackson, had a passion for that particular dish; how he'd got it from a fellow-clubman in St. Paul. Jackson smiled as he thought of how frank and boyish Skinner was in telling him all about it when he said, "We just wanted to make a hit with you." He thought of how contact with Skinner had

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refreshed and stimulated him like champagne. He'd like to do something for Skinner—something big!

And then Jackson thought of Baby Skinner, yes, particularly of Baby Skinner. He thought of how the little fellow had made friends with him right away. Jackson took great pride in the fact that all children liked him. Baby Skinner had confided to him his little troubles and his little ambitions, and had told him how he and his father had gone on their adventure trips in the country, what chums they were. By jingo, that was the way to bring up a boy, Jackson thought.

He put his hand in his inside pocket and brought out a wallet, and from one of the compartments withdrew a faded slip of yellow paper on which was printed in crooked, childish characters, "I ain't afraid to pray an' I ain't afraid to fight."

Jackson scratched his chin and tenderly replaced the bit of paper, then put the wallet back in his pocket. "By jingo," he said to himself, "that little chap must be seven now, almost Sonny's age. I wish Jennie could see

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him. I wish Jennie could get better acquainted with Skinner's little wife. I wish she could see the way they 're bringing up their boy."

No, the business scheme was not of vital importance to Willard Jackson, but he'd like to see the Skinners again. Perhaps—who knows? So he sat down and wrote to Skinner that he and his wife and Sonny were going East and he'd stop in and *talk over* his proposition with him. For Jackson never committed himself.

Almost in no time at all Jackson got a telegram from Skinner:—

We expect you and Mrs. Jackson and Sonny to make our house your home while you are in the East. Will not take no for an answer.

McLaughlin, Perkins & Skinner thought it was a little nervy for Skinner to send that wire, that it might look too much like pushing things. But how could they tell that it was the very thing that Willard Jackson most desired, for they did not know that they had stumbled on the psychological moment.

Jackson did n't consult his wife this time.

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He wired Skinner that he and his family would be only too glad to stop at their home while they were in the East. After the wire had gone, he told Mrs. Jackson what'd he done and she did n't say anything. For there were some things in which Willard Jackson had his own way.

Honey did n't enjoin upon Baby Skinner not to tell anybody that they were going to have the Jacksons as guests, and by omitting to do so she made a mistake that might have upset the well-laid plans that had been hatched up between the partners of McLaughlin, Perkins & Skinner. But how was a little wife to know all these business ramifications.

It so happened that one of Baby Skinner's playmates was little Charley Bacon, youngest son of Charles Bacon, junior partner of Starr-Bacon & Co. The very next day after it was talked over in the Skinner household, and preparations were being made for entertaining the distinguished Westerners, Baby Skinner made the boast that a little boy was coming all the way from St. Paul just to see him. And that

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evening little Charley Bacon repeated the news quite casually to his father.

Bacon, senior, pricked up his ears. "And who is this little boy from St. Paul?"

"I don't know."

Bacon, senior, pondered for a moment. It would n't do to suggest to his little boy that he wanted to know, because children always blundered in diplomatic matters. But presently he said, "When you see Baby Skinner to-morrow, ask him if he knows any little boys in St. Paul."

"Well, did Baby Skinner tell you he knew any little boys in St. Paul?" said Bacon, senior, to Bacon, junior, next evening.

"Yes, sir. He said it was the little Jackson boy that was comin' East to visit him, an' he said that his father was awful rich, an' he owns railroads an' steamship companies an' flour-mills an' foundries."

"I see," said Bacon, senior.

Bacon, senior, being a man of action rather than words, proceeded to his library, penned a telegram, and despatched it by the butler to the branch of the Postal just around the

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corner. Then he turned to the telephone and called up his two partners, Starr and Bergdorfer, who lived in a contiguous suburb, to come over for a game of bridge that evening. To these gentlemen a "game of bridge" might have meant anything. It was in a sense cryptic, but a message involving it was never to be ignored. That's why Starr and Bergdorfer responded to the call, although they had to break previous engagements in order to do so. Within an hour the partners arrived at Bacon's house and were immediately closeted with that gentleman.

"I asked you to come over here to-night," said Bacon, "because Charley got rather an interesting tip from Skinner's little boy." His eyes twinkled. "It seems there's a little boy coming all the way from St. Paul to visit young Skinner."

"Your revelation is interesting, — interesting but not important, so far," observed Bergdorfer.

"A little boy," Bacon went on, with a twinkle in his eyes, "whose father owns railroads and steamship companies and flour-

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mills and foundries, according to young Skinner."

"Still interesting and also most important," Bergdorfer conceded.

"When will they be here?" said Starr.

"Don't know. But I did n't lose any time. Even before I 'phoned you to-night, I wired our St. Paul man to get a line on the train they will take. They may either use Jackson's private car or make drawing-room reservations. Billings 'll nose it out of the railroad people somehow."

"And they're going to stop at the Skinners?" said Starr.

"Evidently," said Bacon.

"Of course," suggested Starr, "we're assuming all this from the idle talk of an imaginative little boy."

"What about it, anyway?" said Bergdorfer.

"What about it?" Bacon laughed. "You Germans know chemistry and machinery, but you don't know men. That's where you're always falling down, Bergdorfer."

"But what about it?" Bergdorfer repeated, ignoring the blanket indictment of his nation.

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"Why should Jackson and his family come East just now, and why should they stop at the Skinners?" said Bacon.

"It does look rather curious," said Starr. "It's worth looking into. Skinner's a mighty smart fellow. It's well to assume he's got something up his sleeve."

"Here's my idea," said Bacon. "They may have caught on to what we're doing — may have, I say, — and realizing that they can't hold their own against us by fair competition, they're working the social end of it. Skinner's great at that."

"I don't see how they could have caught on," said Starr. "Gridley's all right and Bingham does n't know who he's holding the land for."

"I don't know how either," Bacon protested, "but for argument's sake we'll assume that they *have* caught on."

"Very good," said Bergdorfer.

"And if they have caught on, what's their game?" said Starr.

"They want to make some kind of an alliance with Jackson," said Bacon; "you see if they don't."

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"That's plausible," said Starr. "Now, how shall we prevent it? That's the question."

"Easy enough," said Bergdorfer. "Get Jackson over to the plant. You can do that, Bacon. You're an old friend of his. Grab him as soon as he lands — before they get a chance to have a conference with him."

"A better way to put it would be, grab him before Mrs. Skinner has a chance to get in her fine work with Mrs. Jackson," said Starr quietly.

"Ugh!" grunted Bergdorfer. "You Americans are always bringing the personal in; you're always bringing the wives in."

"She's a very adroit little woman," observed Starr.

"Nevertheless," said Bergdorfer, "just you grab Jackson, Bacon, and bring him over to the works."

"You can lead a horse to the water, but you can't make him drink," said Bacon.

"Let me show him our new plant — explain things to him. Let me show him our new machinery, our new location on the river edge where we can bring water-borne freight cheap.

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Let me convince him that we can undersell all competitors and still make a fair profit, and he'll drink, all right," said Bergdorfer.

"You Germans don't know anything but machinery I repeat, plant, figures, concrete things," said Bacon. "You're great engineers, but you don't know men."

"Ugh!" Bergdorfer grunted.

"I've always tried to impress upon you that personality and sentiment are big factors in this game," said Bacon.

"Ugh!" Bergdorfer grunted, contemptuously, but good-naturedly.

"Don't you understand, Bergdorfer, that Jackson is very fond of Skinner?" Bacon urged.

"He may be very fond of Skinner, but he's very fond of dollars," Bergdorfer rejoined. "Business is business, and Jackson is one of your typical big American business men."

"That's just the trouble," observed Bacon. "He *is* a typical big American business man and you don't understand typical big American business men."

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Bergdorfer laughed good-naturedly. "You Americans are all alike."

"That's just where you get left, my dear Bergdorfer. You measure us by your German rule where they *are* all alike."

"But why do you argue against me so?" said Bergdorfer. "I only ask you to get him to the works. I'll do the rest."

"I know you will, Bergdorfer," said Bacon. "I only want you to be thoroughly sure of your ground. I only want you to know what you're up against."

"Don't worry," said Bergdorfer. "We are so preëminently superior to our competitors, as I shall show Jackson. Why, prepared as we are now, anything they can do will be negligible, futile. We 'll have 'em licked before they have time to wake up."

"They may be negligible now, Bergdorfer, but they have brains, remember that," said Bacon.

## CHAPTER XI

### SONNY JACKSON COMES TO TOWN

A WEEK later Willard Jackson, his wife, Sonny, a maid, and Sonny's valet arrived at Meaderville, and were immediately made comfortable in a considerable section of the Skinners' home, which had been assigned to them.

As Willard Jackson had hoped, Mrs. Jackson took to Honey in her own especial, patronizing way, and Honey, wholly unconscious that she was being patronized, responded spontaneously to the sentiments of the older and infinitely more worldly woman. The dinner that night was a jolly affair. Even Mrs. Jackson let down the bars, much to her husband's gratification, and was almost human.

Sobersides had accepted the visitors wholly on Skinner's recommendation. As a rule, Sobersides did not approve of outsiders, but that was owing to no lack of sociability on his part. It was due, in fact, to a certain solici-

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tude which he felt as general guardian and custodian of the Skinner family. He took his cue from Skinner, and made a considerable show of friendliness, wagging his tail in glad welcome, as he carefully registered in his dog's notebook the smell of each one of the guests. He had previously registered the valet and the maid and had classified them as servants, because of the similarity of their smells to certain kitchen and pantry odors to which he was accustomed, and so paid no further attention to them.

It was somewhat more difficult for Baby Skinner to adjust himself to the princeling appearance and general attitude of his little guest. Loyal to his father, and feeling a deep responsibility in the matter, he cudgeled his little wits to see how he could possibly make this newcomer fit in with his general scheme of things, for he had contemplated exploiting the young scion among his pals. It was a poser for Baby Skinner. For some time he did little more than regard Sonny with wide-eyed wonder.

Baby Skinner could n't quite classify Sonny

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Jackson. Of course, he was not in the Copper Toe class, nor yet was he a Silk Stocking. Nor yet was he like a little girl. No, Baby Skinner decided, he was in a class by himself, the Sonny Jackson class, a class of one.

Whenever Sonny Jackson spoke, it was with an air of lofty authority, absolute finality, that quite took Baby Skinner's breath away. Sonny had a certain musical drawl which, combined with his general appearance and manner, prompted little Skinner to register a prayer that he would not be expected to introduce him to his neighborhood companions. For he knew what would happen to Sonny if he did. And so he suffered a condition of dreadful stage fright in regard to the matter, until Skinner assured him that he would n't have to do it.

“Well?” said Skinner, when he and Honey had retired to their room.

“Well?” said Honey.

“What do you think?” said Skinner.

“What do *you* think?” said Honey.

Skinner shrugged his shoulders.

“Do you know, I’m beginning to like her,”

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said Honey. "I never thought I would after the time we met her in St. Paul. But I am."

"That's good," said Skinner, relieved.

"But is n't he adorable?"

"Who? Jackson or the boy?"

"Jackson, of course. He has n't changed a bit."

"Men like him never *do* change," said Skinner.

"He's nothing but a great man boy!" said Honey enthusiastically. "That's what he is, a man boy!"

"I was a little bit afraid she'd be too stand-offish for you," said Skinner.

"I tell you," said Honey, "she is n't that exactly. But you want to remember, she's the wife of an immensely influential man. She's been courted and run after until she's come to think that everybody has designs on her."

Honey abruptly fell silent and Skinner watched her out of the tail of his eye, for a moment, for he knew what she was thinking about. "What do you think of Sonny?" he presently ventured, trying hard to restrain a laugh.

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“I don’t know just *what* to think of him.”

“In other words, you don’t know whether it’s his fault or her fault. Is that it?”

“Somehow, I think it’s her fault.”

“Did you notice how Baby was sizing him up at the table, bless his little heart?”

“I should say so. I was terribly embarrassed. He was fascinated by him. He did nothing but stare at him — sat there with his mouth open.”

“The curious part was, young Jackson was entirely unconscious of it,” said Skinner.

“So was Mrs. Jackson.”

“No, she was n’t,” said Skinner. “Not on your life, Honey. And she gloried in it. I could see that.”

“Don’t you think Mr. Jackson was a little bit annoyed at the airs Sonny put on?”

“He may have been, but he would n’t show it in a thousand years, if he were. They’re *his* people! Right or wrong, they’re *his* people, and don’t you forget that, Honey!”

“But what do *you* think of Sonny?”

“I did n’t dream he’d be like that.”

Honey was silent.

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"What's up now?" said Skinner, reading her thoughts again.

"What do you think will happen when Sonny goes out to play with the boys?"

"I was thinking of that all through dinner, Honey. Gosh! Jimmie McLaughlin would n't do a thing to him — the little bulldog!"

"Dearie," Honey almost whispered, "to turn this boy loose in this neighborhood would be like waving a red flag before a lot of untamed young bulls."

"What would the Copper Toes think of him?" said Skinner.

Honey shook her head.

"He's not only a Silk Stocking, but a Silk Stocking raised to the *nth* power. And," Skinner went on, "that exaggerated form of speech. Gosh! I don't see how Jackson stands for it."

"It is n't our business to know why Jackson stands for it, Dearie."

"You're right, Honey."

Skinner thought a moment; then, seriously, "Honey, this boy complicates our problem. We'll have to exercise the greatest caution. We'll have to do some finessing all around."

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“For instance?” Honey suggested.

“The principal thing will be to keep him and Jimmie McLaughlin separated. If we can’t do that, then you must be present whenever they are together.”

“But I can’t be policeman to a lot of little boys,” Honey protested. “What would Mrs. Jackson think?”

“I don’t know, Honey,” said Skinner. “But I *do* know this”—very seriously—“that boy is the key to the whole situation. He might not be able to help us any, but he could do a whole lot to defeat our plans.”

“I don’t see just how he could defeat your plans,” said Honey quizzically.

“Don’t see how? He’s the apple of her eye, the product of her super-aesthetic ambition. To offend him would be to slap her in the face. And what is more important, while Willard Jackson may or may not approve of it all, he will back up everything she says or does. You remember how Alexander the Great said his baby ruled the world, don’t you?”

“Never heard of it,” Honey admitted.

“Well, he said this: ‘My baby rules his

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mother and his mother rules me and I rule the world.' Catch the point?"

Honey nodded.

"Just let anything happen to that boy through any fault of ours and you see where we get off, don't you?"

They were silent for a moment; then Honey said, "Well?"

"I've got an idea!" said Skinner.

"Just as I expected," said Honey.

"By it I think I can kill two birds with one stone."

"Oh, you're perfectly splendid, Dearie! What is it?"

"Mrs. Jackson has always practiced a policy of exclusiveness with the boy." Skinner smiled. "Don't you see if we keep the boys to themselves, with perhaps one or two of the most exclusive and refined little girl playmates, she will accept it as a tribute to her sentiments, a sort of acknowledgment of a certain social superiority which would be very gratifying to her? And, at the same time, it will safeguard Sonny from any possibility of annoyance."

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"That's good, so far as it goes," said Honey. "But we must be prepared. Suppose Mrs. McLaughlin comes to call and brings Jimmie along?"

"I've provided for that contingency."

"Just how?"

"I've appointed Baby and Sobersides a bodyguard for our little friend. I particularly impressed it upon Baby, and I think he impressed it upon Sobersides, for I saw them conferring together, that he was to protect his guest from any annoyance. He understands. I specifically stated that if any of the boys should, by any chance, say or do anything unpleasant to Sonny Jackson, he must take care of him, that I'd hold him responsible." He laughed. "I think his responsibility weighed on him pretty heavily, for while we were at dinner he seemed to be figuring out just how he could avert any embarrassing situation."

"It's wonderful, Dearie, how you solve all problems."

And Skinner smiled in gentle approval.

"We're banking everything on Baby, are n't we?" said Honey enthusiastically.

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"Right-o!" said Skinner. "I also figured it out this way. If Jimmie *should* do anything mean, any feeling of resentment the Jacksons might have would be mollified by Baby's coming to the rescue. See?"

Honey nodded.

"Now, don't be afraid of Baby. He can handle his dukes, all right. I know that. And he won't be afraid to give young McLaughlin a wallop on the jaw. I've prepared for that also. Trust me!"

Honey crossed over to Skinner, perched on his knee, and put her arms gently around his neck. Then, much to his surprise, she laid her face against his and he felt a tear touch his cheek.

"I was *so* wrong, Dearie," Honey said presently, "to oppose you when you were training the man side of him."

"Yes?" said Skinner, not knowing exactly what was coming.

"Yes, Dearie. You builded better than you thought when you taught him to box."

Thus vindicated, Skinner chirked up: "Did n't I? Say, *did n't* I?"

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The reflection that everything was going so smoothly, — in the matter of Willard Jackson, — owing to his foresight and preparedness, gave Skinner a great sense of comfort as he got ready for bed that night. But Skinner would not have felt quite so comfortable if he had known that when Jackson's train pulled into Philadelphia that afternoon, no less a person than Charles Bacon had boarded it and had spent a considerable portion of the trip over to New York in earnest talk with the magnate from St. Paul.

It was in accordance with the foregoing little plan arranged by Skinner that the exclusive little Sonny Jackson of St. Paul continued to be exclusive during his visit to Meaderville. Whenever he went on the street, if not with his mother, Honey or Skinner went with him, unobtrusively, of course. And whenever he deigned to play, the young scion had for playmates only Baby Skinner, a little niece of the Colbys, who, be it understood, was the object of Baby Skinner's first boyish affections, and Sobersides. The children and Sobersides always played in the Skinners' ample yard.

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Both Copper Toes and Silk Stockings had looked forward with no end of anticipation to meeting the wonderful youngster from the West. Each faction at once designed to confer upon him honorary membership. The Copper Toes calculated that because young Jackson belonged to the West he must be a red-blooded boy and a fighter and would naturally ally himself with their faction. The Silk Stockings, on the other hand, had figured out that because of his father's unheard-of wealth, he must be exclusive, refined, and would through natural selection line up with them.

Never was a small boy so loaded with attentions and flattery as was Baby Skinner because of the vicarious importance that had been thrust upon him. Copper Toes and Silk Stockings alike courted him. At first, he was puzzled by their new attitude, but small boys are not great diplomats and the cat soon got out of the bag. It was n't Baby at all they were after, but Sonny Jackson.

Baby, as usual, stuck to his middle-of-the-road course. But he had hard work to avoid

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being deflected into one or the other of the rival camps. It was an offer of ice cream by a Silk Stocking—for the Silk Stockings were the moneyed faction of Meaderville boy aristocracy—or it was a couple of marbles offered as a bribe by a Copper Toe. But each invitation or gift was made with the proviso that Baby Skinner was to use his influence to bring Sonny Jackson into the would-be briber's camp.

Baby Skinner would have been more than human as a small boy if he had n't traded on his new influence. But confusion followed. He found himself more or less committed to each side, not in so many words, but from the mere fact of having accepted favors. As the time drew near for him to deliver the goods—in the shape of Sonny Jackson—Baby Skinner was greatly worried. He feared that he had let himself in for something strenuous. Each side accompanied its demand that he keep his word—a word that he had never given, by the way—by a reminder that the purchase price had been paid in advance in ice cream, marbles, candy, and the like. Conse-

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quently, he was immensely relieved when his father informed him that young Jackson's social activities would be confined to the Skinners' front yard.

No sooner had the policy of exclusiveness adopted by the Skinners for young Jackson become apparent to the Copper Toes of Meaderville than the word was passed that Baby Skinner did n't think they were good enough to play with his little visitor from St. Paul, because Sonny Jackson's father owned steamships and railroads and whole cities and one or two States. In brief, Baby Skinner was going to renig. The spirit of resentment at once arose within the sturdy breasts of the Copper Toes. And resentment promotes scheming in the small boy, no less than in the man. Now, the youngster's scheming is never for gain. It is always for adventure or revenge. In this case it was the latter. They — the Copper Toes — would show Baby Skinner that he could n't snub them or go back on his agreement, for which they had paid in advance, with impunity.

The word was carried to Jimmie McLaugh-

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lin at once, and the young leader made it his business to reconnoiter.

Jimmie walked down the street, on the opposite side from the Skinners', whistling his indifference as he went. As luck would have it, the three children were there, ready for their romp. At least, Baby and Isabelle were romping. Sonny looked on indulgently and Sobersides lent a dignified acquiescence to it all. Jimmie purposely kept looking straight ahead until he got directly opposite the Skinners' yard, then he turned just enough to take in the situation through the tail of his eyes. The sight of Sonny Jackson brought him to a dead stop. He'd never seen anything like that before: dainty, long-shanked, slippereed and bowed, broad-collared and curled, and all the rest of it. It must have been a flag created for his especial benefit. For a moment, he saw red. With instinctive caution he sized Sonny up. The boy was slender, but tall, almost as tall as he, Jimmie. He snorted contemptuously.

Jimmie proceeded, whistling as before, until he came to the next corner, then turned, made

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a détour of the block, and in a few minutes was back at headquarters again where he found the gang waiting for their leader's report. He wound up his contemptuous characterization of Sonny Jackson with, "Just wait, fellers, wait! He's in the Skinners' front yard now — nothin' doin'! Just wait!"

And the Copper Toes waited.

While all this was going on in Meaderville upper-gangdom, things were happening in the office of McLaughlin, Perkins & Skinner.

## CHAPTER XII

### IN WHICH BABY SKINNER SCORES ONE

McLAUGHLIN had learned through certain sources that the Starr-Bacon people had "caught on" to their scheme of an alliance with Jackson and were ready to move heaven and earth to convince that gentleman that it would be to his interest to ignore any overtures that McLaughlin, Perkins & Skinner might make, and to tie up with them, the Starr-Bacon people, again. In fact, there was small secrecy in the matter.

One morning Jackson, with his usual brusqueness, told McLaughlin that he had been invited to inspect the Starr-Bacon's new machinery in course of construction at Newark, and that he was going over there the following day. He assured McLaughlin, however, that his very great friendship and affection for Skinner would hold him fast to their firm unless the Starr-Bacon people could make

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an almost ruinous offer — ruinous to Starr-Bacon, not to Jackson.

“Unless they *do* make such an offer,” said Jackson, “I’ll seriously consider Skinner’s proposition.”

But even Jackson was not wholly sincere. His loyalty to Skinner was not unadulteratedly disinterested, although he would feign have had McLaughlin think it was. However, like most other human beings, although he had a genuine affection for Skinner, Jackson’s principal motive in standing by him at this particular time was that he could see that his wife had been favorably impressed by the Skinners’ little boy and by their method of bringing him up, and he figured that if he could only keep her there long enough, no end of good might result.

Jackson’s words did not wholly comfort McLaughlin, for that gentleman was not aware of the very potential motive behind them.

Everything was at high tension in the private offices of McLaughlin, Perkins & Skinner during the day of Willard Jackson’s

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visit to the new plant of the Starr-Bacon people. But they had done their best. They had put their proposition squarely up to Jackson. The die was cast. The partners could do nothing further than await with the keenest anxiety whatever decision in the matter their distinguished customer from St. Paul might reach.

At last the distinguished visitor from St. Paul finished his inspection of the Starr-Bacon plant.

Seated in his car, with a big, black cigar between his teeth, Willard Jackson thought, thought energetically, systematically, about what he had seen and about what he had heard from the lips of the voluble Bergdorfer. But what he had seen interested Willard Jackson the more, for he always depended more upon his eyes than his ears, particularly when the merits of any machine or proposition were being dilated upon by an interested demonstrator. Jackson tried to be judicial, that is, he didn't want his fondness for Skinner to prejudice him against the proposition of the Starr-Bacon people. Bergdorfer had

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certainly made good, he admitted to himself. There was no doubt the new machinery would do all that was claimed for it.

Jackson wondered, with some resentment, why a smart fellow like Skinner had been caught napping.

Yes, Bergdorfer had pointed out how he could save a barrel of money by going over to them. But he did n't *want* to go over to them. He wanted to let Skinner have his business. That was the hitch. He wanted Skinner to have it.

But Jackson's big motive, the one underlying all others, was Skinner's baby. Somehow he felt that through Skinner's baby he was, in some way or another, going to get his *own* baby back. Things were going well down there at the Skinners', he reflected, better than he had hoped. His wife liked Honey, and Sonny was playing with other children,— actually playing with other children.

Jackson put on one side of the scales Bergdorfer's arguments and the possible gains to himself,— which were very much bigger than Bergdorfer had dreamed of,— and they

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weighed heavy. And on the other side of the scales Jackson put — well, he put a picture, a picture that he had kept in his heart because to show it to anybody would have seemed like disloyalty to his wife, a picture of Sonny Jackson reclaimed to him — a regular boy. That was a powerful picture that Willard Jackson saw — Sonny, a regular boy.

For a moment the scales with the great Starr-Bacon plant, with Bergdorfer and his big meerschaum pipe, and the huge profits that Jackson might make on the one side, and the regular boy on the other side, stood still. But Jackson's eyes were on the regular boy, his heart was with the regular boy, for the regular boy seemed striving to save Jackson some way or another, and Jackson knew it. And as Jackson looked, and his heart went out to the regular boy, that side of the scales began to go down, down, down, and the side with Bergdorfer and the plant and the profits seemed to go up, up, up, until he could n't see them any more. There was nothing left of them, for the only thing Jackson saw was the regular boy.

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But Bergdorfer did n't see the scales that way. He saw Sonny Jackson and Mrs. Jackson and the social influence of the Skinners and all that buncombe that Bacon had talked go up and up and up, and the pile of dollars that he'd put on the other side of the scales, the dollars he'd promised Jackson, go down and down and down until they were the only things that he could see. And that's what he told Bacon as he strode up and down the office and smoked his great meerschaum pipe complacently and bragged about what a "cinch" it had been to land this great big typical American business man.

While Willard Jackson watched the scales go one way, and Bergdorfer watched them go the other way, and while McLaughlin and Perkins and Skinner waited, and watched the scales hang balanced, now a little this way, now a little that way, now a little this way, now a little that way, waited and watched anxiously, apprehensively, things were happening — things of most momentous import were happening in Skinner's front yard out in Meaderville.

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The three principals in the little comedy drama that was being acted in Skinner's front yard out in Meaderville were Sonny Jackson, in his usual princeling get-up, little Isabelle Colby, the object — as already noted — of Baby Skinner's ardent affections, and Baby Skinner. Sobersides was the audience.

When Honey sent the children out to play, she gave each one a large piece of candy. Unfortunately, this candy was not of the molasses kind, that requires long chewing. If it had been, a scene would have been averted, a scene which threatened dire consequences. But, as good luck would have it, paradoxically speaking, this scene which threatened dire consequences was *not* averted. The candy that Honey handed out so generously was in itself harmless. It was of the long, softly brittle, flat-stick variety, designed for very young and very old persons. It was the kind of candy that can be devoured quickly, bolted almost, without subsequent inconvenience to the bolter thereof.

Now, Sonny Jackson was very fond of this kind of candy. In fact, it was some that his

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mother had brought with her from St. Paul, designed especially for the young scion. It was only while eating candy that Sonny really forgot his manners. The present occasion proved no exception to the rule. Once he received his stick, young Jackson practically bolted it, much to the envy of Sobersides, who, wounded that he had not been included in the group of favored ones, had to content himself with watching the others devour the morsels that he coveted.

Baby Skinner ran Sonny a good second in the speed with which he also disposed of his candy. But little Isabelle, not that she was n't greedy, but that she was more affected, nibbled her bit daintily.

When Sonny had bolted his stick of candy, which only served to whet his appetite for more, he turned and beheld the almost virgin bit that still lingered in the dainty fingers of Isabelle. This he at once coveted. Now, the greedy little maker of verses had never had the chivalrous side of him developed. To make a long story short, Sonny edged over to Isabelle, and, holding out his hand,

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said, "You don't want that candy. Give it to me!"

"I do, too!" said Isabelle, and forthwith put the candy behind her.

Baby Skinner looked at Sonny Jackson as if he could n't believe his ears. Was it possible he could mean what he said? Could *anybody* say a thing like that to little Isabelle and mean it? The most disreputable Copper Toe even would n't say such a thing to a girl. He flushed with anger, but said nothing.

The next moment Sonny had grabbed Isabelle by her shoulders, swung her around, and wrenched the bit of candy from her fingers.

Baby Skinner was in a dilemma. He loved Isabelle, and under ordinary circumstances would promptly and actively have resented what had befallen her. But his hands were tied by the fact that Sonny Jackson had been put in his charge. His father had made him the young scion's custodian, protector. Besides, he reflected, Sonny Jackson had n't done anything so terrible to Isabelle. He'd only snatched a piece of candy from her fingers. He had n't slapped her face or pinched her.

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That, he, Baby Skinner, could never have stood for.

But when Isabelle began to cry, Baby Skinner's attitude underwent a decided change.

Woman's tears have always been potent with the male sex. When she's two years old, her tears affect her father. When she's a little older, they affect her first sweetheart. When she's middle-aged, she uses them to move the son who's too big for her to thrash. But her tears are always potent. And Baby Skinner was of the male sex.

With Baby Skinner's change of attitude, his logic underwent a change. He now reasoned that his father's instructions had meant only that he was to protect his little guest against Jimmie McLaughlin or the Copper Toes—not against himself. Red to the roots of his hair, and not unmindful of the fact that the wet eyes of Isabelle were upon him, he threw all caution, all diplomacy to the winds. He strutted up to Sonny, like a bantam rooster, and struck a boxing attitude.

“You,”—he wagged his head,—“you give that candy back to her!”

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Sonny looked at him in amazement. No one had ever spoken to him like that before. It was absurd, quite absurd. The presumption of it might have angered him, but he was inclined to be indulgent. "Say," he sneered patronizingly, "do you know who I am? I'm Sonny Jackson! I don't give things back! I don't have to!"

"I don't care *who* you are," cried Baby Skinner, choking with excitement, "you give her back her candy!"

Really, it was quite preposterous, but Sonny Jackson was still indulgent. "No, I won't! See!"

"Yes, you will! You will so!"

"Say, I asked you if you knew who I am — I'm Sonny Jackson!"

That in itself should have been a clincher. But it did n't serve to check Baby Skinner's purpose. So, as he advanced a step, Sonny retreated a step, still not believing the little bantam could really mean to attack him. As he backed away, he held the candy behind him, wagging the precious morsel in a defiant, teasing way.

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Sobersides was directly behind Sonny, and the latter's approach, although a backwards one, and the wiggling of the candy were construed by that gentleman as an invitation. Slowly he advanced and then with a quick movement of the jaws disengaged the morsel from the unsuspecting fingers of Sonny and bolted the same with one solitary gulp.

At the act of Sobersides, and the sudden shock it gave Sonny, Baby forgot his anger and Isabelle forgot her tears, and they both laughed outright. But Sonny, piqued at the loss of the candy and the derision of Baby and Isabelle, turned upon the innocent cause of his discomfiture, and, while that perfectly natural dog was looking up and wagging his tail as much as to say, "Thank you. Have you any more?" advanced a step, drew back his foot, and fetched him a stout kick in the ribs.

Sobersides gave a sharp yelp of pain, and withdrew to a distance which a lightning calculation taught him was beyond the reach of Sonny's slipper.

For the first time in his life Baby Skinner

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saw red. His beloved Sobersides, his chum, his confidant, Sobersides, who had always comforted him against his hairy breast when he was in trouble, Sobersides, with whom he had an offensive and defensive alliance, had been kicked, kicked in the ribs by a stranger,—think of it! Sobersides kicked in the ribs!

Without a word Baby Skinner squared off, shot out with his right, and landed plumb on Sonny Jackson's nose. The blow was a good stiff one, delivered with all the weight of Baby Skinner's body behind it, as he braced himself on his two sturdy legs, and Sonny Jackson was knocked off his pins.

The sharp yelp of Sobersides brought Honey and Mrs. Jackson to the door just in time to witness the assault of Baby Skinner on Sonny. The sight was too much for Mrs. Jackson. She forgot herself, forgot everything. She gave an hysterical scream and started forward. Sonny turned and at the sight of his mother scrambled to his feet. "Come here at once, Sonny! Come right away from that vicious child!" called out the unrestrained lady.

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Mrs. Jackson was in the habit of letting her hysterical temperament get the better of her and then regretting it afterwards. She was unfortunate in her lack of self-control. She realized that her temper was uncertain. She'd suffered much shame because of the fact. She had resolved, again and again, to keep a bridle on her tongue, knowing the mortification that always followed an exhibition of temper. But she'd never done so. It seemed as if some imp of the perverse had stood, ever watchful, at her elbow, waiting for the fatal moment, and then had pulled the guard from her tongue and prompted her to say the mischievous word.

But this was an extraordinary occasion, the most extraordinary of all. It required no prompting by the imp of the perverse within Mrs. Jackson to make her speak. Right in front of her eyes she had seen her child, her offspring, her delicately nurtured, super-aesthetic, poetic darling, against whom no profane hand had ever been raised, assaulted, hit on his aristocratic nose, knocked down. The money queen had actually seen *lèse majesté* committed.

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Mrs. Jackson always argued with herself after every breach of good manners her hysterical temper might betray her into committing, argued speciously, not so much to mollify her conscience as to justify herself to herself. So she argued now—with herself—that her boy had been assaulted. It was up to Honey to apologize.

Honey had been on the point of apologizing, demanding an explanation from Baby, anything to mollify Mrs. Jackson. But that lady's allusion to her little boy as that "vicious child" set every drop of red blood in her veins to tingling. It flashed through her mind that it was an hysterical exclamation on the part of Mrs. Jackson, that that lady would apologize for it later. But "vicious child" had tongue-tied Honey. She could n't bring herself to apologize. She thought of the disastrous results that might follow. But, even so, she could n't do it. She could n't apologize to any woman who had called her darling little boy a "vicious child!"

If the two women had only come together at once, if each had made some concession to

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the feelings of the other, or had spoken the sympathetic, mollifying word, the whole thing might have been patched up. But Mrs. Jackson expected an immediate apology from the less rich woman, although she vaguely realized that her own words "vicious child" had made an apology impossible except from the lips of a cowardly, fawning sycophant. And Honey had too much good old Yankee blood in her veins to fawn upon anybody who was only rich.

Mrs. Jackson's next specious argument — with herself — for self-justification was that Honey sympathized with what her little boy had done to Sonny. On the other hand, Honey felt that Mrs. Jackson should apologize for her hasty temper. And so the breach widened instantly into an almost impassable gulf.

Mrs. Jackson felt that under such conditions it would be impossible for her to remain a guest of the Skinners. So, when she had composed herself, she told Honey as much. "Mr. Jackson and I talked the matter over and we thought we would n't intrude any further on your hospitality, so we engaged rooms at the

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Claremount down the street." She knew that Honey knew that this was a lie, but that it was the polite lie, calculated to avert further embarrassment. And Honey understood.

Mrs. Jackson called her maid, gave that person instructions, then putting on her hat she said quietly, "Good-afternoon, Mrs. Skinner," walked out, took Sonny by the arm, and together they passed out the front gate and down the street.

Honey stood watching her departing guests, dazed with it all. In a few brief moments a little thing, trivial, absurd in itself, had occurred that would upset all of Skinner's carefully laid plans. She tried to realize what had happened. Could she have averted it in any way? Her eyes filled with tears. If she had only—but, no! She set her jaws resolutely. That woman had called Baby a "vicious child"!

A block away, a stout little figure flashed past Mrs. Jackson and Sonny, and made off in the direction of the headquarters of the Copper Toe gang. This was no less a person than Julian Devereaux, who had been doing

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scout duty in the neighborhood, and was now hastening to carry the news to the Copper Toes of the defeat in one round of the young Westerner by Baby Skinner.

Jimmie McLaughlin received the scout's report in stoical silence — as became a leader.

While Honey, at one end of the line, was frantically trying to get Skinner's business 'phone number, the three partners were sitting in McLaughlin's private room, watching, waiting, watching the scales go just a little this way, just a little that way, whistling to keep their courage up.

"Jackson's bound to stick to Skinner," said McLaughlin, and then Skinner's side of the scales went down a little.

"But," urged Perkins, and so evenly were the scales balanced that the mere weight of "but" sent the Starr-Bacon side down just a little.

McLaughlin heaved a deep sigh. "I wish that the darned thing was over," he said. He stopped short and turned as the door opened and the telephone operator looked in.

"Wanted at the 'phone, Mr. Skinner."

"Switch 'em on here. Who is it?"

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“Mrs. Skinner.”

“All right. I’ll go in my own room.”

“She may have some news from Jackson,” said Perkins as Skinner closed the door behind him; “he may have called up his wife out there at Meaderville,” — at which McLaughlin and Perkins arose and paced the floor nervously, silently.

“Hello, Honey,” said Skinner, picking up the receiver. “Yes.” Skinner frowned. “Is that you, Honey? Oh, nothing — I did n’t quite know your voice. Don’t talk so fast. What’s the matter? Something dreadful? Yes, go on. Yes, I hear you. Now, take your time. Now, say, Honey, darling, take your time. You’re talking so fast I can’t get it. Yes, I see. The deuce, you say!” Skinner was very serious. “Is that so?” There was a pause; then Skinner asked eagerly, “Say, Honey, which licked?” He grinned broadly. “Knocked him down with one blow?” He put his hand over the sender so that Honey could n’t hear him chuckle; then after a moment, very quietly, “I know you can’t tell me all of it, Honey, over the ’phone. Yes, now that’s all right.

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Nobody's to blame. No, don't worry. The Claremont? Yes, I see. I'll come home. Yes, right away. Good-bye. Oh, say, Honey,—mind you don't scold him!"

Skinner hung up the receiver. For a few moments he thought, thought hard. He could hear his partners walking to and fro in the next room. There was no sound of voices there. He felt that they were waiting for some word from him, waiting for some word from Jackson sent from Newark via Meaderville. What should he say to them? That was the rub. He deliberated the matter for a few minutes, then took his hat and stick, crossed the room and looked in at McLaughlin's door. "I'm off for Meaderville," he said. "Honey just 'phoned me to come out."

"Any good news, Skinner?" said McLaughlin. "Anything from Jackson?"

"No, to both of those questions," said Skinner. "I'm off. Good-bye."

When Willard Jackson stepped from the train at Meaderville that afternoon, he was met by Sonny's valet.

"Beg pardon, sir," said that gentleman's

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gentleman, "but Mrs. Jackson would like you to come to the Claremount House."

"They're having tea there, I suppose," suggested Jackson.

"Not as I know of, sir. Mrs. Jackson only told me to ask you to come there."

"What's the idea of all this, Jennie?" said Jackson, entering his wife's parlor a few minutes later. "What's the idea?"

For answer Mrs. Jackson burst into tears.

"Come, pull yourself together, Jennie, pull yourself together," Jackson coaxed, patting her shoulder. "What's it all about?" — which sympathetic touch brought a fresh hysterical outburst. "Come, come, Jennie, it can't be so bad as all that!"

At this Mrs. Jackson managed to pull herself together enough to tell her husband what had happened in the Skinner's front yard. "They — they — fought!" she said, between sobs, "they — fought!"

"Who fought?" said Jackson, puzzled.

"Sonny and Skinner's baby!"

Jackson felt a thrill, a strange little thrill. "Which licked?" he demanded quickly.

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“That — that little barbarian of a Skinner knocked Sonny down — Sonny did n’t do a thing!”

“Ugh!” said Jackson disgustedly; “knocked down and did n’t do a thing! I might have known it! What was it all about?”

“It was n’t about anything! That vicious child hit Sonny — hit him in the nose and knocked him down!”

“Where’s Sonny?” said Jackson.

“He’s — he’s in his room. Now, Willard, don’t speak to him about it — he’s — he’s so upset!”

“Upset, is he?” Jackson flecked the ashes from his cigar onto the carpet, paced the room twice with quick, energetic steps, then halted abruptly. “I’m disgusted,” he growled, “disgusted! Here I come home, tired, expecting to spend a pleasant evening down at the Skinners’, and this is the kind of a mess I find!”

Willard Jackson was angry through and through. It was not because he was to be denied a pleasant evening at the Skinners’. It was not because the boys had had a fight. That did n’t mean anything to him, and he was more

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disgusted than angry that his boy had been licked by a younger and smaller boy. No, Willard Jackson was angry through and through because his plans for the reclamation of his boy — as he put it — were frustrated. He was angry because the hope that had suddenly come to life in him that he might soon have the companionship of his boy and the hope that his son might develop qualities of leadership were dashed.

When Willard Jackson was really angry, Mrs. Jackson made it a rule to be silent. But this was an exception. She had done a very foolish thing. She felt that in his heart her husband blamed her for the whole fiasco, so she must justify herself in his eyes. Mrs. Jackson, like other adroit women, knew how to avail of the anger of other persons. She knew that an angry man seldom stops to be logical. Clearly, then, the thing to do was to make Willard angrier. It would be easier to make him see the thing as she saw it. So she threw more coals on to the fire. "I'm sure his mother urged him on," she sobbed.

"Nonsense, Jennie, nonsense!" Then, paus-

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ing abruptly in his walk, "What makes you think so?"

"She stood there and saw the whole thing and she did n't even scold him! Does n't that show that she approved of it? Is n't that the same as urging him on?"

"Did n't she say anything to you?"

"No!"

"Did n't she explain?"

"Not a word!"

"Did n't she say anything when you told her you were going to leave?"

"Not a word! She let me come away without saying a word! It's the most outrageous treatment! Oh! Willard! Willard!!"

At this point Mrs. Jackson's emotions were too much.

Any such emotional outburst on the part of Jennie always frightened Jackson and then made him angry — not angry at Jennie, but angry at the person who was the cause of it.

"Urged him on, did she?" he shouted, turning on his wife. "Did n't scold him? Did n't offer any explanation? Did n't say anything when you told her you were going to leave?"

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He shook his fists in the air. "They can't treat my people that way and get away with it!" he raged. "I'll show 'em! I'll show 'em!"

Jackson picked up his hat and stick.

Mrs. Jackson was a little frightened at this, for she knew that when Willard got started, there was no holding him back. "Willard! Now, don't!" she pleaded.

"You let me alone, Jennie! I'll go and have it out with Skinner and then we'll go home! Sonny!" he called loudly, "Sonny! Here!"

Mrs. Jackson lifted her hands in protest as Sonny appeared at the door. "Willard! Willard!"

"Get your hat, boy!" Jackson ordered grimly.

"But, Willard," protested Mrs. Jackson, "Sonny must n't go there after what happened to-day!"

"Sonny *is* going there — he's going with me — I want him there to hear what I say! I want him there so the Skinners can't lie out of it!"

"Oh, very well, if you want me to," said Sonny nonchalantly, and got his hat.

## CHAPTER XIII

### IN WHICH A CERTAIN YOUNG PERSON TREADS ON THE TAIL OF THE WRONG DOG

As Willard Jackson and his boy walked down the street, Jackson's feelings were energetically, aggressively disagreeable. He was disgusted, angry; disgusted that he had permitted any social element to enter into his business affairs, angry that a split between him and Skinner should have occurred through no fault of his own or of Skinner's. But there was only one thing to do now, for Jackson was a bull-headed, stubborn man, who prided himself that when he put his hand to the plough, he never turned back. And he had tacitly promised his wife to have it out with the Skinners. Why the deuce had n't Skinner been more careful? Why the deuce had n't Honey appreciated the situation sufficiently to have avoided such a mix-up? Why had n't she been more tactful? Clearly, it was the

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Skinner's fault. Then, why should he stick to Skinner?

Jackson was not a vindictive man, but — suddenly he saw the scales again. There was only one side to them now, the side holding all the inducements that Bergdorfer had offered. There was nothing on the other side of the scales — no "regular boy" — nothing to counterbalance, to overcome.

The more Jackson thought of it all, the more disgusted, the angrier he became.

When Jackson was angry, his customary solace was a big, black cigar, which he bit and chewed savagely instead of uttering irrecoverable words, words that he would regret. He put his hand in his pocket for the aforesaid black solace. There was none there. He looked about. It was a residence street with fine houses set in ample yards. There was no tobacconist's in sight. Two blocks beyond, he spied a drug-store on the corner and made straight for it with energetic strides, Sonny following close. "I just want to get a cigar."

"I'll wait for you on the corner here," said Sonny.

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It was a beautiful afternoon.

After purchasing a cigar, Jackson asked for a Bullinger Guide. "I want to find out about the trains for St. Paul."

The clerk handed Jackson the book and he proceeded to study it carefully.

Just at this moment, a block away, a small boy appeared, one Julian Devereaux, whom Jimmie McLaughlin had assigned to scout duty in the neighborhood of the Skinners', for purposes hereinafter indicated. Now, Julian had not seen the powerful figure of Willard Jackson disappear into the drug-store. All that he saw was the princeling figure of Sonny, standing like a lily stem on the corner. No sportsman could have regarded a buck, silhouetted against the sky on a nearby hilltop, with keener anticipation and delight than did Julian regard this strange bird of wonderful plumage. At last the opportunity for which the Copper Toes had longed was at hand. His, Julian Devereaux's faithful, patient scouting was about to be rewarded. Never before had Sonny Jackson ventured forth unattended. That fact, coupled with the proximity of the

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drug-store, might have portended something to Julian, but it did not. His business was to obey orders. Sonny Jackson was on the corner—alone!

By a curious coincidence, at the same time that the Copper Toe scout was making his run to headquarters, just around the block, a young Silk Stocking passed down on the opposite side of the street, and whistled as he went. His eye, too, was caught by the fastidious presence on the drug-store corner. Now, that part of Meaderville was the center of Silk Stockingdom, and it did not take this little member of the élite more than a minute or two to summon the other Silk Stockings of the neighborhood.

The Silk Stockings, be it understood, had never hated Sonny Jackson. They had regarded him with green-eyed envy, and on the part of some, with adoration. So in less than no time the Silk Stockings had gathered in considerable numbers, and from a respectful distance regarded Sonny Jackson. Here was a chance, perhaps, to get acquainted with, to cultivate, the scion. So they moved on in a

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body until they came to a point on the opposite side of the street from the drug-store, and halted.

From a block away, in the side street, now appeared Jimmie McLaughlin leading his Copper Toe cohorts, who straggled along behind, gleefully timid and timidly gleeful, expectant.

Sonny Jackson turned and saw the Copper Toes, but paid no attention to them. They meant nothing to him but a gang of small ruffians. There were small ruffians in St. Paul, little toughs who had tried to assault the sons of the rich. But to everybody out there, the person of Sonny Jackson was sacred. He'd led a charmed life. Casually, Sonny glanced across the street and observed the bunch of Silk Stockings, and as casually he looked away again. They might have been the sons of tradesmen or of the moderately rich, for all he cared.

As Jimmie McLaughlin led his cohorts forward, the sight of the Silk Stockings across the street added the keenest zest to his enterprise. He would not only humiliate the great scion from the West, but at the same time he would

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strike terror to the hearts of the Silk Stockings. Now, Jimmie was, above all things, theatrical. So, having an audience made up of the enemy faction, he would proceed to demolish Sonny Jackson single-handed. At a short distance from the corner he lifted his hand, indicating that his gang was to halt where it was, watch developments, and not interfere unless some opposition might develop in the ranks of the Silk Stockings.

Meantime, Sonny Jackson glanced casually up and down the street. Meantime, a robin soared in graceful ellipses in the blue. Meantime, a zephyr, a gentle zephyr that might have come all the way from St. Paul, touched with æsthetic fingers the topmost branches of the tallest trees. Meantime, Willard Jackson assiduously studied the Bullinger Guide.

Everything was calm, quiet, portentously so.

And Jimmie McLaughlin advanced to the attack.

When he was within a few paces of Sonny, Jimmie paused, while the Copper Toes watched eagerly, and the Silk Stockings, on the op-

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posite side of the street, watched, hesitant, afraid, breathless.

And everything was portentously quiet.

“Hey, you!” exclaimed Jimmie abruptly.

Sonny Jackson turned, lifted his eyebrows, then, realizing that this young person could not possibly have been addressing him, casually turned away again.

“I mean you!” said Jimmie, approaching, putting his fingers against Sonny’s shoulder, and giving him a push.

Sonny turned, surprised, and stepped back.

Willard Jackson closed the Bullinger Guide, nodded his thanks to the clerk, and stepped to the door. He was about savagely to bite the tip from his cigar, but the sight that caught his eye halted him. He was near enough to the boys to see and hear everything. He saw young McLaughlin push Sonny. He saw Sonny turn and step back.

Then, young McLaughlin, pointing a taunting finger at Sonny, sneered in a sing-song way, “Ain’t you ’shamed—licked by a ba-bee! — licked by a ba-bee! — licked by a ba-a-a-bee-e-e-e!”

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“Ugh!” groaned Jackson. “That’s what he gets for letting a baby lick him! It’ll stick to him all his life!”

Again Sonny Jackson retreated a step. Again young McLaughlin approached and shoved him.

“You let me alone!” cried Sonny in a high-pitched voice.

Willard Jackson ground his teeth. “Ugh!” he groaned away down in his soul, “why don’t he slug him!” He saw with deep mortification that Sonny was white.

But Sonny Jackson was not white with fear. A certain deadly rage had seized him. His person had been violated by this young ruffian. The poet, the æsthete, the poser were pushed aside. The blood of Willard Jackson in his veins stirred, stirred strong, began to rush. And Willard Jackson, standing in the door, saw something suddenly come into Sonny’s eyes that he’d never seen there before, a certain steady stare that he had noticed in his own eyes in his mirror at times.

The color had come back to Sonny’s face. He was getting madder and madder every

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moment. Suddenly Jimmie gave him a smart slap on the cheek.

“If I’m any judge,” thought Willard Jackson, “that boy made a mistake when he did that.”

Right then Sonny Jackson struck out like a cat and fetched the bully one between the eyes. Jimmie staggered back, astonished, and Sonny, quick to note this, sailed into him. He had never been trained to spar, but he fought with a fury that was demoralizing to the enemy. He flung his arms about like a flail, landing a perfect rain of blows on Jimmie’s face, his curls flying in wild disorder as he fought.

Instantly, it flashed through Jimmie’s mind that he’d stepped on the tail of the wrong dog. The realization was not reassuring to him. While he was dazed by the discovery, Sonny handed him another one right between the eyes and Jimmie was on his back. He scrambled to his feet, a bit groggy. Sonny went at him again. But this time they clinched and Jimmie’s weight gave him the advantage. He bore Sonny to the earth with a resounding bump.

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And Willard Jackson never lifted a finger to interfere. "By gad, I don't have to!" he thought.

The Copper Toes watched the mêlée with confused feelings. Some hated Jimmie, some loved him, but they all feared him. The Silk Stockings were fascinated by the sight just as a flock of sheep would be, watching a shepherd dog fight a pack of wolves.

From underneath Sonny quickly lifted his right and planted a blow on Jimmie's left ear. The bully drew his head to one side to avoid a repetition of the same and Sonny, by a dextrous movement, rolled him over. Sonny was now on top, but for an instant only, for the momentum the struggling bodies had attained carried Jimmie on top again. With a quick movement Sonny got the enemy by the throat. That sort of thing had never happened to Jimmie before. He had tackled other boys, to be sure, but never one of the wild-cat-fox-terrier-rolled-into-one variety. As loud as he could do so, with the other boy clutching his windpipe, he gave a hoarse, gurgling cry for help.

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And Willard Jackson, turning, saw a band of small Copper Toes stealing toward the fighters.

With a desperate effort Jimmie broke Sonny's clutch on his throat. Instantly, his courage was revived, for he was on top, struggling to ride the wriggling, twisting bunch of energy, nerves, and muscle underneath like a broncho buster.

Jackson now realized that Sonny was beginning to do strategic work. He saw him turn his head sidewise and with his eyes measure the distance from where he lay to the curb. "By gad, the little devil's jockeying for position," he thought; "he's fighting with his fists and his head, too!"

Then Jackson saw Sonny lie perfectly still, his teeth set and with a curiously grim smile, and his eyes watching the eyes of his antagonist. It was a regular prize-ring method and effect.

"He's watching for an opportunity," said Jackson to himself.

Jackson noticed that the Copper Toes were continuing to approach stealthily, on tiptoes.

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Just then Jimmie, sure of himself, lifted his right hand and waved them back as much as to say, "Don't worry! I'll take care of this fellow myself!"

Jackson knew what was coming as well as if he'd been the underneath man in the fight himself.

The instant Jimmie was off his guard, Sonny, with a jerk, arched his back and threw his rider over. Jimmie was taken by surprise, but he caught Sonny around the neck and hugged him close so that he could n't do him any damage. Sonny by his quick move having acquired the momentum that he was after, kept the rolling process going. Over they rolled, again and again, struggling, fighting as they went, over the grass, over the flagstone, through a strip of mud to the curb. And now Sonny was underneath.

Then Jackson saw Sonny wriggle, arch his back again, and with one strenuous effort land his enemy in the gutter with his arms and shoulders wedged helpless in the angle between the curb and the gutter. This was what Sonny had planned, as Jackson could see. Sonny,

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having the enemy helpless, proceeded to punish him. "Take that, you thug," he cried, raining blows on Jimmie's nose, "and that! You will hit me in the face when I did n't do anything to you; will you? I'll teach you a thing or two!"

"Le' me up, an' I'll show *you*!" cried Jimmie.

"All right — *get up!*"

Jimmie dragged himself to his feet, but Sonny's windmill arms were instantly at work again, beating a tattoo on his face.

"Quit!" cried Jimmie, throwing up his arms to protect his eyes which were blackened and swollen. "Quit, I tell yer!"

Jimmie turned. As he did so, Sonny spied the Copper Toes approaching. The sight of them added to his fury. "Come on," he cried, "you rats! I'll lick the whole bunch of you!"

And Willard Jackson stood there, dumbfounded, trembling at the sight of it all.

Realizing from Sonny's words that the gang was near, Jimmie turned, with a brave attempt to save the last, fast-vanishing shreds of his reputation, for he knew that if he did n't fight

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he could never face the Copper Toes again, that his leadership would be lost to him forever. But he could n't face those quick-fire blows. They were demoralizing, blinding. He stood there a moment taking his punishment, then turned ignominiously and fled, and the gang, demoralized by the fate of its leader, fled before him like a flock of frightened sheep.

Sonny Jackson, his rage still on the increase, pursued Jimmie, hopping on one foot and kicking him with the other, while Jimmie drew in behind as he ran, to lessen, if not wholly avoid, the punishment he was getting.

Away they went, the whole gang of Copper Toes, scattered, vanquished by one Silk Stocking raised to the *n*th power!

The drug-clerk had come to Jackson's side and stood watching the fight. The master workman turned to the young man and shook his head. He could hardly speak.

“By gad, he can fight,” said the clerk, “that boy *can* fight!”

“That's my boy, that is,” said Willard Jackson hoarsely; “that's my boy!”

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And for a moment the sporting blood in them made the eighteen-dollar man and the multimillionaire equals.

Willard Jackson stepped out and called sharply to Sonny, who was standing in the middle of the block watching the tail end of the Copper Toes disappear around the corner beyond. And the tail end of the Copper Toes was now Jimmie McLaughlin, their former leader. "Sonny! Sonny, come here!"

Sonny turned and came back to his father's side in a shamefaced kind of way, much as a dog does after having sent some disreputable intruder from the highway about his business. And what a sight he was! Willard Jackson bit savagely — but not with anger — at the end of his big, black cigar, as he observed the very marked change in the appearance of his young hopeful. Sonny's clothes were covered with mud and grass-stains, the bows were knocked off his slippers, the white flesh shone through the knee of one black stocking where contact with the edge of the curb had cut it, while the other stocking had fallen about the ankle, the garter dangling

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below. His lace collar was torn from one side, part of it hanging down his back, one eye was puffed and black, and one beautiful, pearly tooth, looking like a kernel of Country Gentleman corn, was hanging by a fine thread of flesh. And there was mud in his ears.

In disgust Sonny tore the dangling tooth loose, flung it away, and spat on the ground. Willard Jackson stooped down and picked up the tooth and carefully deposited it in the corner of his waistcoat pocket.

“What did you do that for?” asked Sonny. “I don’t want it any more.”

“I do,” said Willard Jackson; “I’m going to have it set in a ring. Come on, let’s be going.”

“I’d better go back and wash some of this muck off,” said Sonny.

Jackson had never heard Sonny say “muck” before. It sounded curious. Likewise Sonny’s voice had changed. His manner had changed. There was a calm assertiveness about him. He was no longer a petulant.

“No,” said Jackson, “come on. We’ll finish up this Skinner business first. Then you can go home.”

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As they started down the street Sonny Jackson impulsively flung his arm around his father's waist. He had never done such a thing before. The touch thrilled Jackson as nothing had ever thrilled him. He put his arm around Sonny's shoulders and together, with arms locked and triumphant, they proceeded down the street to the Skinners', unmindful of the fact that at a respectful distance a bunch of Silk Stockings was following admiringly, and also unmindful that, far to the rear, like a band of coyotes, a straggling group of Copper Toes watched them wonderingly, admiringly, from behind trees, a group of leaderless Copper Toes. They proceeded in silence for a little time, but Sonny's exuberance, the exuberance of a mighty triumph, was not to be repressed for long. He began to bubble boyishly. "Say, Pop!"

Willard Jackson turned. Sonny had never spoken to him that way. It had always been "Papa." "Pop!" The sound was as the sound of angels' voices to the delighted ears of Willard Jackson.

"Pop!" repeated Sonny.

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“What is it, Son?”

It had always been “Sonny.” The change of those two words marked the beginning of the new relations between father and boy.

“If I lived in this town, I’d be the boss of all the boys here.”

“No doubt about that, Son.”

Thus encouraged to brag, Sonny went on, “I’d make those Copper Toes do anything I wanted ’em to.”

“I guess that’s so, Son.”

A brief pause; then, “Say, Pop, do you know what I think?”

“No, Son.”

“There’s something wrong with gang management in this place.”

Willard Jackson bit his cigar hard and scowled a little in a perplexed kind of way, “How so, Son?”

“Why, it’s this way. They’re fighting each other in a small field.”

“Well?” said Willard Jackson, more keenly interested in what his son was saying than he had been in anything else for years.

“Say, Pop, do you know what I’d do?”

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“No, Son, what would you do?”

“Why, it's simple enough.”

The words gave Jackson another thrill. It was a phrase that he'd used all his life, used persuasively to his business associates, used arrogantly to his antagonists. At one time they'd called him “It's-simple-enough-Jackson.”

“How do you mean *simple enough*, Son?”

“I'd bunch those two gangs, the Copper Toes and the Silk Stockings, together into one big gang and I'd lead 'em out and we'd lick the gangs in the next town.”

“How do you know you'd lick 'em, Son?”

“'Cause they would n't be bunched like ours. We'd lick 'em one at a time.”

“Gad,” thought Willard Jackson, “this boy is not only a fighter — he's a captain of industry!”

Jackson paused, looked up into the heavens as if trying to collect his wits. It was all so sudden, this new thing that had come to him. “When did you think of all this, Son?” he asked presently.

“I was studying it out while we were having that scrap.”

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“I thought you had something else to think of just about that time, Son.”

“It did n’t take all my time. I knew I could lick him when I first hit him and he went groggy. Say, Pop!”

“What is it, Son?”

Jackson’s arm tightened around the boy’s shoulder, and he felt an impulsive, responsive tightening of the boy’s arm around his waist. It was a hug that took ten years off Jackson’s life.

“Say, Pop!” A pause; then, “I want to have these curls cut off!” Another pause; then, “They get full of mud when I fight!”

Jackson felt that they were on dangerous ground. Those curls were an important part of Mrs. Jackson’s darling scheme. He did n’t commit himself.

“I see,” he said.

“Say, Pop!”

“What is it, Son?”

“I’m not going to read poetry any more!”

“I see,” said Jackson, still non-committal. But his heart beat high, for he felt that he had won out or somebody had won out for him.

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“Say, Son,” said Jackson, after a long pause, “how’d you happen to fight that way?”

“That’s the only way I *could* fight. I never was taught to fight any other way.” Then, with surprise, “It was all right, was n’t it? I got there, did n’t I?”

“You bet it was all right! You bet you got there, Son! I’m mighty proud of you! But what I meant was, how did you happen to fight at all?”

Sonny looked at his father reproachfully. “You did n’t think that I had it in me, did you, Pop?”

“Oh, yes,” Willard Jackson hastened to correct, “but I never saw you —”

“ ’Cause out in St. Paul, no one ever tackled me, Pop. They let me alone. They were afraid of you. I had it in me, all right!”

“And that boy, Jimmie, brought it out, eh? Is that it?”

“No, it was n’t, Pop! It was Baby Skinner. *He* brought it out.”

Jackson halted abruptly and stared hard at Sonny. “Why, he — er —”

“I know what you’re goin’ to say, Pop; he

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knocked me down. He did. But he could n't do it again! Yes, Pop, I was so mad an' so kind of ashamed that a little boy like that could knock me down that I made up my mind that the first chance I got, I'd fight some boy, just to get even — I'd fight the whole gang, just to get even — I'd — I'd lick somebody, just to get even!"

"Just to get even with Baby Skinner, Son?"

"No, Pop; just to get even with myself!"

"And so it was the crack that Baby Skinner gave you in the nose that made you see all this, eh?" said Jackson meditatively.

"Yes, Pop!"

A humorous twinkle came into Jackson's eyes. "Would n't you like to lick Baby Skinner?"

"Lick him? Why, he's only a baby! 'Say, Pop, Baby Skinner was right!'" Sonny chuckled. "Say, Pop, I kicked his dog Sobersides in the slats!"

"I see," said Jackson, biting his cigar hard, but not with anger. "Come on."

Honey had just finished telling Skinner all

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about it. And Skinner was feeling blue, very blue. Baby Skinner was in the nursery bragging to Sobersides how he, faithful to their alliance, had gone to his rescue when his ally was attacked, and Sobersides had acknowledged it by poking his cold nose into Baby Skinner's face and wagging his tail gratefully.

"It looks bad," said Skinner. "It's a deuce of a note, is n't it? I can understand how you would feel about it — your child — I'm awfully glad you did n't scold him — because, you know, Honey, he did just what I taught him to do."

"You know I was *so* afraid, Dearie, when you taught him to box —"

"Now, don't twit!" broke in Skinner. "It had to happen and it *did* happen. Don't let's spat. That sort of thing always upsets me, and you know it. I want to use all my wits."

Skinner crossed to the window, thrust his hands in his pockets, and stood looking out absently. Honey went over to him and put her sympathetic fingers on his shoulder. "Oh, Dearie, if you only *could* get one of your ideas!"

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"If I could see Jackson, we might patch it up," said Skinner. "It can't be as bad as you say, Honey."

Honey grabbed at his arm. "Look!"

Skinner started back. He had already seen.

On came Willard Jackson, with a look of pugnacious resolution, his arm around the shoulders of the disreputable-looking Sonny. Skinner regarded Sonny for a moment; then turned to Honey. "You did n't tell me it was as bad as that. It does n't seem possible that Baby —"

"I — I was — so upset — so wrought up — I — I — did n't notice," stammered Honey. "It's — it's incredible." Without another word she went to the front door.

"Howdy," said Jackson. "Skinner here?"

"Come right in, Mr. Jackson."

As Jackson and Sonny entered the room a door opposite opened slowly and Baby Skinner and Sobersides stole in and stood there watching, in awed wonder.

Skinner stepped forward, while Jackson paused. "I'm — er — I'm awfully sorry — er — this happened, Mr. Jackson. I — er — I

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can't tell you," — he let his eyes dwell on Sonny, — "it's — it's awful!"

"Awful?" growled Willard Jackson, — "awful?" But it was like the growl of a good-natured dog. "Awful? It's the finest sight I ever saw!"

"Well," said Skinner, dazed, "go on."

"Skinner," said Jackson, "I came down here to have it out with you for letting your boy punch my boy in the nose. I thought that punch was the deadliest insult I'd ever had. But, you see, Skinner, it was a blessing. Look at him! See what he's done!"

For the life of him, Skinner could n't understand what Sonny Jackson had done, unless it was that he'd gone mad and rent his hair and torn his clothes and wallowed in the mud. The sight may have been beautiful to Jackson, but Skinner was somewhat æsthetic. He could n't see it that way.

"What *has* he done?" said Skinner.

"*Done?* Why, he's licked a whole gang of boys alone! He licked the leader first and then scattered the whole gang like a flock of sheep! You never saw anything like it in your

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life, Skinner! He must have got it from my father. He was a fighter, he was!"

"By Jove, you don't say so!" cried Skinner, overcome with relief. "Licked the whole gang!" He laughed like a boy.

And Jackson laughed, too, like a great, big boy, and Sonny stood there, grinning, with one tooth gone and the point of his tongue thrust into the hole, which made him look half foolish, half waggish, and Baby Skinner grinned shyly at Sonny, and Sobersides stood there wagging his tail.

Jackson turned to Honey, who was wiping the tears from her cheeks. "Won't you take him upstairs and fix him up a little, Mrs. Skinner?"

"I don't want anybody to fix me up! I can fix myself up!" said Sonny gruffly. Then to Baby Skinner, "You just wait till I come down. You can come out and play with me. I won't let anybody hurt you."

When Honey had taken the boys upstairs, with Sobersides following in their wake, sniffing at Sonny's heels to satisfy himself that this was the boy he'd seen before, Willard

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Jackson turned to Skinner. "Skinner, I've always been somewhat superstitious. I believe that the things you want to happen will happen. I believe you can kind of bring it about. But they don't always happen the way you expect 'em to happen. When I came from St. Paul, I was looking for something to happen. It *did* happen. It happened a darned sight more sudden than I thought it would happen. And it happened in a very different way. But the thing is, it *did* happen!"

"Yes, it happened, all right," said Skinner, rather dazed.

"You bet it happened!"

"I see," said Skinner.

"No, you don't," said Jackson; "you don't see at all. And I'm not going to tell you, either. Where's your telephone?"

"In there," said Skinner, absently; "I'll show you."

He led the way into the next room, then retired, closing the door behind him, that his guest might have greater privacy. But he might just as well have left the door open, for the great master workman talked so loudly

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that the whole house might have heard what he said. "Give me the Claremont." A pause; then, "Hello, Claremont. Mrs. Jackson, please." Another pause; then, "Hello, Jennie." His voice was gentle now. "I'm down here at the Skinners' — say, Jennie, there's been an awful mistake — that's all right, Jennie — yes, I understand — yes, I know all that — they're terribly sorry — something you don't understand — they want you back here immediately." Jackson lowered his voice a little, but Skinner could n't help hearing. "Now, Jennie, I want you to be politic — for my sake, Jennie, — I'm going to make an alliance with Skinner's firm — yes, tomorrow — I know how you feel, but they feel an awful lot worse than you do — Good! — That's the talk! — You're the right kind! — Bye-bye."

Jackson hung up the receiver, bit his great, black cigar meditatively, then opened the door to the next room, confident, as usual, that he'd not been overheard, for he never realized how he always shouted into the telephone sender. "Skinner," he said suddenly,

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"I feel that we've made an awful mistake. You don't mind if we come back here, do you?"

"*Mind?* Why, great Scott, Mr. Jackson!" Skinner choked. "*Mind?*" He grasped Jackson's hand. "Say, Mr. Jackson, between man and man, I'm awfully sorry that my boy hit Sonny."

"You know why he did it, don't you?"

"I asked him, but he would n't tell me. I've taught him not to tattle."

"He's a little brick! I'll tell you why he did it. Sonny told me. And, say, what tickles me is, Sonny said Baby was right."

"But what *made* him do it?"

"Sonny kicked the dog Sobersides in the ribs. Hang it, I'd have hit a man if he kicked my dog, would n't you? But, by jingo," Jackson went on, not giving Skinner a chance to put in a word, "Sonny says he could n't knock him down again that way!"

"Why, of course, he could n't, after what Sonny's just done to those boys. I should say not! That little tap in the nose only woke Sonny up."

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“That’s it!” cried Jackson,—“that’s it!—woke him up!—woke him up!” Jackson put his hand on Skinner’s shoulder. “Skinner, that crack in the nose my boy got is worth a million dollars to me!”

THE END



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